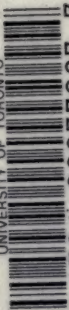


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THE ANTAGONISTS



E. TEMPLE THURSTON

THE ANTAGONISTS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE APPLE OF EDEN

TRAFFIC

THE REALIST

THE EVOLUTION OF KATHERINE

MIRAGE

SALLY BISHOP

THE CITY OF BEAUTIFUL NONSENSE

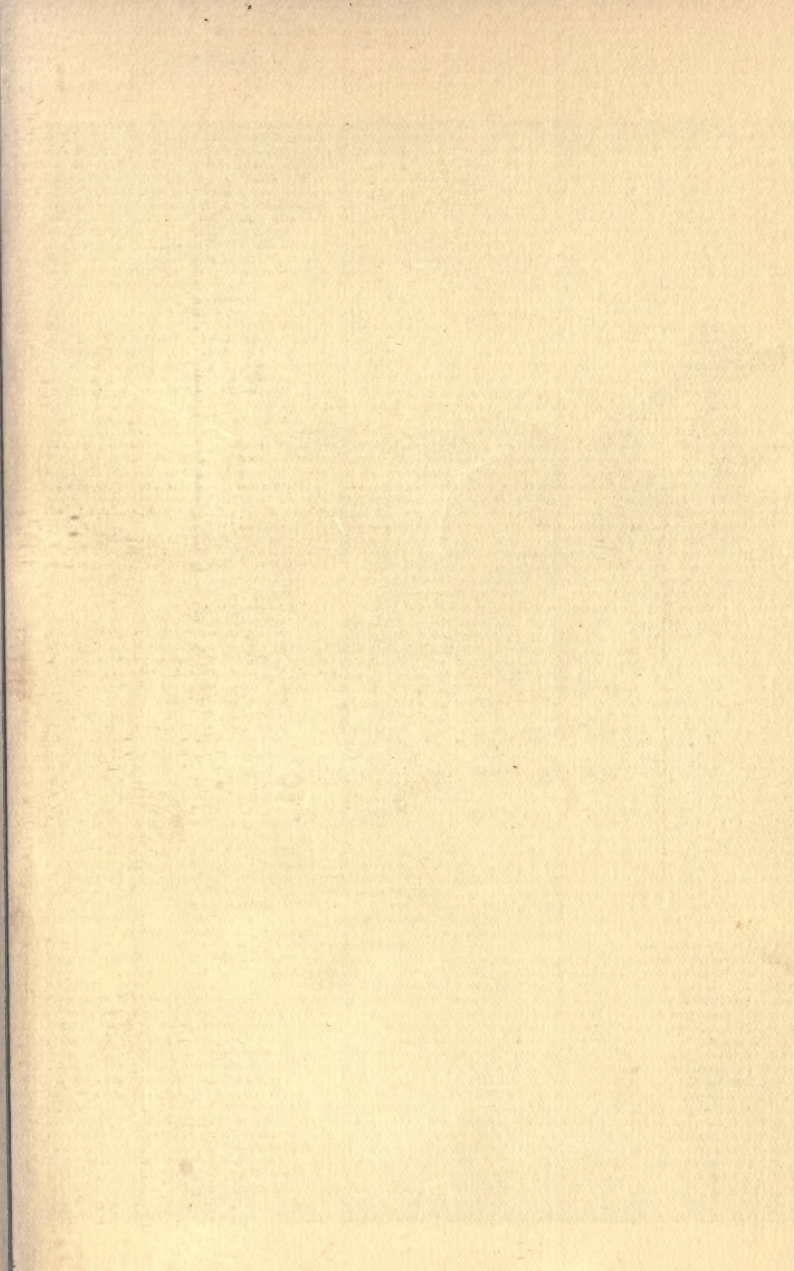
THE GREATEST WISH IN THE WORLD

THE PATCHWORK PAPERS

THE GARDEN OF RESURRECTION,

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THIRTEEN



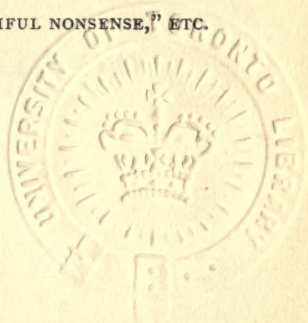


THE ANTAGONISTS

BY

^{Ernest}
E. TEMPLE THURSTON

AUTHOR OF "THE CITY OF BEAUTIFUL NONSENSE," ETC.



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TO
ARTHUR WAUGH

MY DEAR WAUGH,

You have fathered me so long and with no recognition of mine for your office of parent that I look back at my list of books with some sense of shame to think that I have not openly acknowledged my filial respect before now. From the moment when first you accepted the "Apple of Eden," transforming me from a child of colossal hope to one of little promise, your sympathies and interest in all I have tried to do have been more valuable than I am able to admit.

What is more to your credit, you have shown me that a publisher may not only be a financial speculator in that making of books of which there is no ending, but also a counsellor and friend whose advice is worth the imprint of a thousand years' repute.

A publisher once said to me of a certain author: "Of course we look after him. We never allow him to do more than four books a year. It'd never serve us or him, if he wrote himself out."

But seemingly it has not only served you to see that I did not write myself out, but that I wrote the best I could without regard for those aspects of the case which combine to make of business the business that it is.

So I ask you to accept "The Antagonists." You know well enough how some people have said I ought to write another "Sally Bishop"—others that I should repeat "The City of Beautiful Nonsense"—that in one or the other, I should meet with some success. And you, my publisher, are content that I should write this book, which is neither. Surely above all, then, you must be my friend, as I am yours,

and always,

E. TEMPLE THURSTON.

"Gellibrands."



THE ANTAGONISTS

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

It was Autumn. The morning was early. Out of a luminous mist the sun had just risen above the horizon. Everywhere there was the sense of that far-distant waking of the world, when a cock crows in the East, another faintly answers him in the West and then all is still.

Already the shepherd was out with his dog on Bredon Hill ; a motionless figure on the hill-side, destroying none of that illusion in his silent watchfulness that the world was yet asleep.

From the dense hawthorn bushes on the hill a dim twittering of birds came intermittently as though the light of the sun were stealing through their windows, stirring them against all inclination to the necessities of another day. After each faint rustling of their voices, doubtless they laid down their heads again on the warm pillow of their wings—sparrows, greenfinches, chaffinches, all alike. There was just that cold catch in the

air which made the morning as yet too early to be abroad. Still, in another moment, they were chattering once more. When the sun calls you, there is little use in procrastination. You must get up.

There was twittering of birds then upon the hill-side, but down in the valley, where the Avon stretched through the grey meadows, the moist air still hung close and heavily. There, the only sound was the rushing of the water as it tumbled over the old weir by Trafford Mill. To those who know that sound well, the valley might well have been silent, for the sun had not as yet dispersed the chill veiling of the mist and almost everything that lived was still sleeping in its bed.

Across the meadows, there stood the great encampment of an army, the ghostly white tents of the mist, the dim forms of the willows and the may trees, like horses tethered by their side. Only the cattle moved there—a cow at early grazing, shifting one reluctant step at a time and with another being lost amidst the white encampment of the mist.

By the river side, the tips of the reeds pricked out, a thousand bayonet-points into the sun. The pale pink of the willow herb had already faintly caught the light; and above all this, away up into the zenith of the cloudless sky was a glow of golden primrose gilding the tops of the elm trees and wrapping the heights of the uplands in the warm promise of a faultless day.

Through infinite degrees the soft moisture melted

beneath the sun, until only the spiders' webs, stretched taut upon the reddening brambles, were grey—such lace a fairy might have wrapped about her shoulders.

And now the birds began in noisy squabbings to dart out from the hedgerows. That far silent figure of the shepherd moved at last. For a moment his dog and he became living things, then both were gone from sight below the hill. A mile away, the clock of Eckington church tolled out the hour of six and, with the last stroke of it, from the mill house, came the sound of an opening window. A boy appeared against the darkness of the room beyond, an instant stayed there, the next had clambered out upon the sill, slid easily down a water-pipe to the ground and disappeared in the dark growth of laurels which enclosed the little garden of the mill.

At that hour of the morning the earth belongs to those who need her ; the ploughman is emperor of his thousand furrows, the shepherd, king of all the wide uplands he can see. Even the boy, unchaining his dog from the old barrel in the yard and setting forth across the wet meadows to the first rise of the hill, even he felt the swelling pride of possession and, when he was out of hearing of the house, let go his voice in a boastful song.

“Some talk of Alexander and some of Hercules,

Of Hector and Lysander, and such great men as these—”

which meant that he felt a greater hero than any one of them, for the meadows and the orchards, the hedgerows

and the river—one and all belonged to him. As he passed beneath Farmer Lipscombe's apple trees, he swung on to a lime-washed branch and snatched an apple down, burying his teeth in it as he strode onward. Was there any one to stop him? At that hour of the morning, the whole world he walked in was his own.

Along the hedges as he passed, a flight of greenfinches sped before him, settling, whenever they had made distance, to eat the bryony berries while there was time before he overtook them. It was always by the hedges, too, he walked. In those dark crevices at the roots of the hedge trees, Nature hides all her secrets of the world. Dicky knew that. He knew that if he were only as small as a field mouse or as nimble as a wren, he might discover why God had made the earth. Being neither one nor the other, he had to content himself with walking in the fields on the very fringe of mystery.

Once or twice that morning he stopped to examine an old nest which the autumn falling of the leaf had disclosed, and always aloud to himself—for when you are young enough to be certain of these things, you always speak aloud—he would declare the name of the bird that had built it, whether he knew it or not.

And it was not only nests, but everything in Nature that seemed to catch his eye. A rabbit burrow in the hedge, the lightning passage of a stoat as it sped across the road into that hidden world of its own, the flight of a kestrel planing down the sky on a rigid wing; not

one of these things escaped him. He was all eyes, ever eager; and when suddenly he stood still—for as you soon learn it is the motion of matter and not matter itself which frightens those little creatures of the field and of the air—then the rough-haired terrier stopped on the moment at his heels. There they both listened or both watched until the stoat had vanished or the kestrel swung out of sight beyond the hill.

No matter how strong they may be, a dog will ever mould his instincts to the needs of his master. Against all promptings of his nature, Pilgrim would listen or watch in silence. Once he had chased a weasel, had brought back its mangled body and laid it at Dicky's feet. It had been a great chase, a memorable victory, but, by all computation, was not so great a deed as he had expected. Certainly Dicky was very glad to get it. He had kept it beneath his bed for a week hoping to preserve its skeleton, but the odour of decomposition had reached his father's nostrils and a burial in the garden became compulsory. Notwithstanding this acquisition, Pilgrim had to be thrashed and the pain of it led him to suppose that chasing those fascinating things which ran like lightning into the hedges was not considered in the same light as he himself regarded them. Against all temptation, then, when his master stopped, he stopped as well. Undoubtedly his ears were pricked. His eyes nearly tumbled out of his head and little tremors quivered swiftly down his spine. Still in the back of that intelligent head of his was the dim

memory of some painful blows with a stick. It was better to imagine the chase.

But in the evenings when he came home after a long day in the fields, curling himself up in front of the parlour fire to sleep, these imaginations became realities. He dreamed of the stoats and the rabbits he had refused to kill and his stiff hair would bristle. Then a leg suddenly would shoot forth and a few moans come from him, ending with a sharp, short bark. At this he would wake up to find the lamp still burning on the table and Dicky's father peering at him from over the top of his spectacles.

But this morning in Autumn there were no rabbits and never a stoat or a weasel crossed their path. Though the river mist had vanished, there still clung to the earth that chill damp of the air. It hung from the tops of the leaves on the willow trees in glittering points of water. Pilgrim and Dicky walked alone.

When they reached the foot of Bredon Hill they stopped, and Dicky looked expectantly about him. No human being was to be seen. By now the shepherd was far over the hill and only a few sheep grazing were in sight. He raised his hands to his mouth and cried a call. The sound of it sped upwards over the hill-side and, as it carried away into the still silence of the morning, made the world to Dicky seem a bigger place than he had believed. One moment for its travelling and then there came an answering cry from the direction in which he had turned.

"He's coming," said Dicky. Pilgrim's nostrils widened and closed as he, too, looked in the direction of the sound, raising his head to catch the scent in the wind.

Dicky sat down on the branch of a fallen oak and waited until, through a gap in the hedge, there crawled a boy who grinned when he saw that he was late. There is a certain attitude you can assume, implying as it does that your patience is well-nigh exhausted. That attitude Dicky had accurately adopted.

"Knew you'd be late," said he.

"Never woke," replied Wilfrid—"That silly ass Dorothy, never called me."

"Shouldn't have a silly ass for a sister," said Dicky—"Anne's worth six of her. She calls me quick enough. Well—come on. We'll get that grass-snake this morning. It's warm enough on the hill."

Whereupon these two lords of creation, masters already of the womenfolk who mould them, set out up the steep ascent of the hill with Pilgrim following on three legs at their heels. It seemed as though, to attain that obedience which was demanded of him, Pilgrim found it easier to run on three legs. Whenever he put the fourth to the ground the temptation was so great to show he could do without it, that he quickly raised it again. To incapacitate ourselves for wrong is the only way some of us can attain to virtue.

"Saw a hare in one of old Lipscombe's fields—the

big one—this morning,” said Wilfrid presently—“In the stubble—went like billy-o when he saw me.”

Dicky took the information in silence. He had seen nothing.

“You see that kestrel again?” asked Wilfrid.

Dicky shook his head.

“Bet I know where he builds.”

“Bet you don’t!” said Dicky.

“Bet I do! Bet it’s hatched ages ago.”

“Of course it’s hatched. I bet that one we saw yesterday was one of its young ’uns.”

They bet on everything, but with a discreet silence as to the terms of the wager. Once Dicky had lost a pocket knife and, against all protests from his friend, insisted upon paying.

“I bet it,” said he—“I’d have jolly well taken your leash if I’d won.”

When the suggestion was made that they should exchange the leash for the pocket knife, he turned it to scorn.

“I betted!” said he with annoyance, but after that, by a tacit agreement, they never mentioned their stakes.

By the time they reached the top of the hill, the sun was hot in the heavens, the veil was lifted from the meadows, and far below them stretched the great garden of England—one county after another—lying fair and silent in the sun. The white trail of the Avon throwing back the light of sky, crept in and out behind

the forests, growing fainter and fainter till it became a mere pale thread in the dim raiment of the distant blue.

As he regained his breath, Dicky looked down at it all, not yet realising what that breadth of country meant to him, or how much he had to do with the mystery of Nature which he saw on every side. Yet he looked and looked as though his eyes would never tire of it and, notwithstanding Wilfrid's eagerness to be off upon their search, still stood and looked, saying nothing.

"Come on!" exclaimed Wilfrid—"I've got to get back at eight. What are you looking at?"

"I don't know," said Dicky—and they went on in silence to the place where both had solemnly betted that the grass-snake had its abode.

"Come up fearfully quietly," said Dicky; "it'll probably be lying out in the sun."

"Have you got the prong?" asked Wilfrid.

Dicky produced a stout hazel twig from under his coat. It was pronged at one end. Then they crept forward to a may-tree bush, scarlet and green with all its leaves and berries. As he peered round the corner, Dicky's hand shot swiftly back, the sign of caution. He looked round over his shoulder and nodded his head. His eyes were sparkling with excitement. At a safe distance in the rear, Pilgrim sat on his haunches, wriggling the skin up his back, his ears rigid, just bearing the suspense.

The moments were breathless that followed. As Dicky poised the prong over the snake, ready to strike, Wilfrid conceived the idea of an appeal to God.

"Please God," he said to himself—"let him catch it!"

Possibly that prayer had more to do with the matter than Wilfrid ever suspected for, with a swift stroke, the prong descended, the snake was fastened to the ground beneath it and, at the cry of victory that followed, Pilgrim was rushing round them barking wildly.

Dicky surveyed his catch in triumph.

"Isn't he a ripper!" exclaimed Wilfrid—"How do you know he's a grass-snake?"

"I know," said Dicky—"He's quite harmless."

If only for the sake of dignity, a definite statement like that must be supported with actual proof. Dicky picked up the sinuous beast by its tail, laughing at its vain efforts to raise its head on a level with his hand.

"See its tongue," said he—"That's all rot, a snake stinging—they don't—they bite. Grass-snakes can't bite, they haven't got any teeth. By Jove—don't he hiss."

Pilgrim looked on at the wriggling thing in wonder.

"Eugh!" exclaimed the sensitive Wilfrid—"I couldn't touch it!"

"Why—you silly ass—it's all right. It can't do anything. It wouldn't do anything if I put my hand in front of its mouth."

Here Dicky suited the action to the words. There was an instant's pause. The thin flat head darted swiftly back, then, in the flash of an eye, had struck. Dicky felt two pin pricks in his finger and the snake lay twisting and writhing on the ground.

"What happened?" said Wilfrid.

"It's bitten me."

"Where?"

"In the finger."

"But you said it couldn't bite."

Dicky paid no attention to that. Already the world was beginning to slip away from him, tumbling in its increasing littleness over the edge of the hill. He looked at Wilfrid with frightened eyes—it was as though he were looking the wrong way through a sea-man's telescope, slowly pulling out one strand after another.

"I'm poisoned!" he whispered—"Suck my finger for me—suck it—I'm poisoned—" and he advanced towards his companion with his hand stretched out.

It was the look in Dicky's face that struck terror into Wilfrid's mind. He was not a coward; but he was afraid of things that were horrible. Dicky looked horrible and, with every step he advanced, Wilfrid retreated. It was the horror of it that he could not face.

At that, without comment, Dicky put his finger in his own mouth and sucked the poison from the tiny wound, spitting it vehemently out on to the ground. When

his mouth was dry, he looked wildly about him. The snake had gone; slipped away into the mystery of its own world at the roots of the may tree. He swayed on his feet. That sensation of the impossible littleness of everything had left him. He was conscious only that soon some strange thing would be happening and when he saw his own hand colouring to an ugly black, he thought that what must happen would be death. He was going to die. Suddenly he knew how young he was and his lip quivered. He could remember nearly all of the ten years he had lived. Things that had happened to him when he was three, a lie he had told when he was four, became as vivid as though they had happened but the day before and, though each year as it had passed by had seemed a life-time, he knew now how little he was. And it was going to end that day.

There was nothing fine about it. He had not saved any one's life at the cost of his own; he had done nothing brave to make it worth while. He was just going to die because of a beastly, rotten snake. He looked again at Wilfrid—Wilfrid who was quite well—who was going to live. There was a mist in front of him—a mist in front of everything.

"We'd better go home," said Dicky, and there was a mist even in his voice. He could scarcely hear it.

Then in silence they commenced to clamber down the hill-side and all the time Dicky kept wondering why he had to die. Suddenly it occurred to him that he must have done something grossly wrong and that this was

the judgment of God. Then fear took him. He felt it shake him from head to foot. He tried hard to think what wrong it was, that he might say he was sorry and appease God while there was yet time. He could think of nothing. But the fear shook him still more wildly. He fell to his knees and cried out in a thin voice.

"I know I've told lies," he cried—"I know I have—but I can't think of anything else."

Wilfrid and Pilgrim stood shivering and watched him—a little boy on his knees on the bare hill-side, twisted and tortured in the fingers of God.

He struggled to his feet once more, once more began to make his great effort to reach home. It seemed there was one chance left to him; if he could but reach the touch of his mother's hand, she might be able to remember the things he had done which he ought not to have done. But the distance which that morning appeared so small, had now become illimitable. He knew with each step that he could never reach the mill. He swayed again, then once more tumbled to his feet.

"I want mother," he said in a raucous whisper, and turned a pair of sightless eyes to Wilfrid's frightened face. "I want mother," he repeated, beginning then feverishly to crawl upon his hands and knees. Wilfrid watched him helplessly, the tears rushing to his eyes, his knees trembling. Still Dicky crawled wildly on. It was in one sudden moment that he fell again and then lay still. And there, under the beating sun,

Wilfrid thought how small he looked and wondered why he had ever been afraid of him.

“Dicky!” he cried in terror—“Dicky!”

But Dicky never moved, and over the hill-side came the shepherd and his dog.

CHAPTER II

WHEN death comes in dark places, there is a certain congruity about it ; when it cuts short the life of a man and brings him low, there is congruity still. He has lived, you say, and you pray that you may first live also. But when the day is all gold, the sun alight in the heavens, the birds all swelling their throats in song, to see the still body then of a little boy, lying inert beside the smiling hedges, that is the most terribly incongruous sight in the world.

When, to Wilfrid's importunate entreaties, the shepherd followed him across the hill and came to where Dicky was lying, even he felt the strange unnatural sense of things in the sight that met his eyes.

"He be lying like one o' my lambs, when the frosties kill 'en," he said ; and that, as he stood there looking down at Dicky, was all that he could say, except that beneath his breath, he muttered—"Dearie—dear !" just as he would had he lost a lamb from his fold.

"But can't you do anything ?" cried Wilfrid. "He's not really dead, is he ? It was only a grass-snake."

"'Twas no grass-snake, Master Wilfrid," said the shepherd and, kneeling down, he laid his ear against

Dicky's heart and listened. Now, not only was the shepherd hard of hearing, but there grew, on the lobes of his ears, little tufts of hair which, when he pressed his head against Dicky's chest, were made still further an impediment to his hearing. It was thus he had often listened for the beating of a lamb's heart which the frosts had stilled; lying against it while the distracted mother bleated at his side.

Both Pilgrim and the sheep-dog seemed to know that a serious issue was at hand, for though they always met as common enemies—one the guardian of the sheep, the other their pursuer—they now put all disputes aside. Certainly, they found it better to stand wide apart. It is ever that a dog must put temptation out of his way. He dares not meet it.

After a few moments' silence, Wilfrid could bear the suspense no longer.

"Well!" he said—"Well? He's not dead, is he?"

The shepherd looked up with a vacant expression in his eyes.

"I doant hear nowt," said he—"but maybe he's not dead yet. His hand's quite black, look you; but p'raps it is his whole body should be black also before'n be dead. I'll carry'n down to the mill. 'Twill be a fair upset to Mrs. Furlong."

This was the only consolation that the wretched Wilfrid received. With a choking in his throat, he watched Dicky's body, hanging limply as the shepherd raised him to his shoulder. Vaguely he noticed the

lifeless arms that swung helplessly to every motion, the lolling head that nodded in an ugly way from the loosened neck. This was horrible—more than he could bear. The choking in his throat broke to tears. He began crying bitterly, sniffing and gulping as he walked by the shepherd's side. Here now was the trial, the test of it for him. Dicky had passed his ordeal, had met it both with courage and with fear. There is not one without the other. But with Wilfrid, all spirit in him broke down. Like a child returning home with dragging steps to the thrashing he knows awaiting him, the miserable boy followed by the side of the shepherd with Pilgrim, troubled, at their heels.

After a time his sobs subsided, but as they neared the mill house broke out afresh. Indistinctly he imagined Mrs. Furlong's distress and the grave look that would fall upon him from Mr. Furlong's eyes. There was no written law against these early morning excursions ; but just as Dicky had slid down the water-pipe from his window to escape detention, so Wilfrid felt in the back of his mind that he would be blamed.

It was the thought of this that made the tears come back again and apprehensively he caught at the shepherd's coat sleeve.

"It wasn't my fault," he sobbed—"Dicky p-put his hand in front of its mouth."

"That's like Master Dicky," said the shepherd, and said no more.

They were up and about in the mill when Wilfrid pushed open the white wicket-gate, and these two, the shepherd with his burden, walked up the flagged path between the rows of Michaelmas daisies to the stout door of the mill house.

"Shall I knock or go right in?" he mumbled in his beard and, being a man of slow perception, appreciating as yet but little of the critical situation with which he dealt, he decided to knock. But before the decision could be brought to the deed, a woman's voice from an upper window had cried the name of Dicky.

"It'll be a fair upset to Mrs. Furlong," the shepherd muttered, as he heard the sound of hurrying footsteps from within. And then the door burst open. Mrs. Furlong stood there with hands stretched out to take her son.

"Drowned?" she whispered.

There had been nights when she had lain awake listening to the waters of the Avon as they rushed over the weir and, as with all noises when the night is still, they had had an ugly, a hungry sound to her ears. Long she had dreaded it, but in silence as a mother must, knowing that the perils by water and the perils by land are those dangers which every mother's son must face whether it be in the hour of work or play. Only at night these fears and apprehensions had troubled her, but at that moment, when she saw Dicky lying in the shepherd's arms, they rushed back upon her again.

"Drowned?" she whispered.

"No, ma'am, 'tis the bite of a snake on the hill there."

She looked at Dicky's face as she took him in her arms.

"The doctor!" she said. "Tell them to harness the trap at once. James must drive—as fast as he can."

"Eckington, ma'am, or Little Cumberton?"

"The nearest—oh,—the nearest, of course!"

The shepherd at last awoke to the grim seriousness of it all. Mrs. Furlong's voice and not the sight of Dicky's body had brought it to him. Turning quickly on his heel, he ran round to the stable. The door of the mill was closed. On the path between the Michaelmas daisies, Wilfrid still stood, the tears rolling one after another down his cheeks.

There he waited and waited. The minutes went by, but no one came out to tell him how Dicky fared. At last he turned away and, by the road, walked back again to Eckington. The trap passed him on its way. Faithful to all traditions of himself, James, the stableman, drove furiously. Wilfrid stood close to the hedge as the trap swept by and a thickness came back into his throat again as he thought of what it meant. That was their last early morning together. They would never be allowed to go out again. Besides which Dicky was dead.

He did not really believe that. He could not believe it. Boys did not die like that. Death came to a man when he was very old—when he was forty at least.

He had never heard of a boy dying—not when he was strong and jolly like Dicky was. No—he never believed that Dicky could be dead.

Yet he walked straight into his sister's bedroom—heedless of her dressing, his mind still dazed, and——

“Dicky's dead,” said he. “He died this morning.”

And when Dorothy had looked at him and looked, without asking him how or why, she sat down slowly on her bed, and sobbed, with shaking shoulders.

CHAPTER III

BUT Dicky was not dead. At no little distance he had seen death, and in this life that is an experience one may well be thankful for.

When Mr. Furlong saw his son lying on the bed to which Mrs. Furlong had carried him—her own bed, for a mother will trust no other—his lips whitened and he said that something must be done at once.

“Yes—and what?” said she. “How long will James be gone for the doctor?”

He looked at his watch though she had never asked for the calculated answer. She needed only that he should say, and at once, any time within reason that came into his head, so long as it gave her hope.

“Probably twenty-five minutes,” said Mr. Furlong, putting his watch away. “If he doesn’t find the doctor at once, perhaps thirty.”

“And what can we do till then? Something must be done! You see he’s only just breathing.”

“Of course brandy’s a good thing,” said Mr. Furlong, and the sickness at his heart made his tongue dry in his mouth — “Brandy—as much of it as we could

force him to take. The alcohol neutralises the effect of the poison. Brandy's the thing."

"But there's none in the house!" she cried.

"I know," said he.

"Nor whisky either!"

"I know," he repeated, and he tried to think of other remedies he knew. Before he could suggest anything else she had left the room. When he found himself alone, he knelt down by the side of the bed and took Dicky's hand—then—as most men of a religious nature are—being that strange mixture of sentiment and hardness, practical in all common-place matters of life, lacking in initiative when the moment is crucial, the tears came hot into his eyes and he bent his head in prayer.

"Oh, God," he murmured, just loud enough to hear his own voice—"Oh, God—if I have deserved that my son be taken from me, give me strength that I may bear the pain of Thy justice"—which, being phrased in the true spirit of the Church, was doubtless beautiful in its humility, but did no good to Dicky on the bed.

He was still upon his knees when Mrs. Furlong returned. She saw that he was praying but, with that marvellous versatility of a woman, seemed in complete sympathy with him while her heart was beating with impatience. Before he had raised his head from his hands, she was forcing some liquid from a bottle between Dicky's lips.

"What's that you're giving him?" he asked as he looked up.

"Eau de Cologne," said she.

"But Christina"—he rose to his feet.

"I've heard of people getting drunk on Eau de Cologne," she replied.

"Of course there is a percentage of alcohol in it," said he. "It can't do any harm."

Seemingly it had done good, for Dicky's eyes opened.

"Mother," he whispered, and found her close against his heart.

Mr. Furlong put out his hand; but it was only a moment of consciousness. Dicky had slipped back again into that world between life and death of which the wisest of us know nothing. Only one moment of consciousness, and that moment Dicky had given to his mother.

"I'll go and see if the doctor's coming," said Mr. Furlong. As he went downstairs it was more he knew the pain of being ignored than that he felt it.

As soon as the door had closed, Mrs. Furlong began to make Dicky ready for her bed. Upon that very bed in agony of body she had brought him into the world; now in agony of mind she laid him there to rest, slipping off one garment after another with that care and dexterity which, with a woman, is more wonderful than sleight-of-hand. His coat, his knickerbockers, his shirt, his stockings, one by one she laid

them aside, scarcely stirring him as she took them off. At last he lay in a clean night-shirt alone in the big bed, and, as she bent over him, one drop from her eyes splashed fair upon his cheek.

At the sound of the doctor's footsteps on the stairs, she quickly wiped it away.

"Well—what's this?" inquired the doctor cheerfully as he entered.

She shook hands with him hurriedly and pointed to the bed. One moment's examination of Dicky and he stood up.

"A basin of hot water," said he shortly—"a tumbler—tooth glass—anything—a towel. If you go downstairs I'll let you know presently, Mrs. Furlong."

"I'll stay," she replied.

He shrugged his shoulders, but in three minutes was glad of her. She did not flinch, even when holding Dicky's hand for the work of his lancet. In acute pain of mind Mr. Furlong looked on. At the first incision Dicky's eyes opened again; at the second he kicked violently and then again he moaned.

"I must do one more," he heard the doctor say.

"You shan't!" he shouted.

"Very well—I won't," said the doctor when it was done, and Mrs. Furlong smiled for one instant into his eyes.

"Now," said he, "we'll let him rest a bit. You'd better come downstairs."

Mr. Furlong was obedient, but his wife pointed to a chair in a far corner of the room.

"He won't know I'm there," she whispered, "and I can let you know."

They left her there, and there for an hour she watched Dicky's face. Not a movement of his eyelids escaped her. At last he dropped asleep.

Destiny has the whole gamut of the laws of Nature at its command wherewith to mould the creatures of its choice.

It was that early morning in Autumn when Destiny first began its work with Dicky Furlong.

From that day he was to be a different being, was to enter upon the second phase of his making, the second of the many through which he must pass before he could become that Richard Furlong whose name the world knows now and will remember when many another is forgotten.

CHAPTER IV

THERE were three long weeks in that large bed for Dicky before he might see the fields again or feel the touch of the grass beneath his feet. From his bedroom window only the sky was visible with just one break—the plume of a high poplar which nearly reached the window catch. So then, whenever he was alone, he watched the sky—the sky at early morning growing into the brilliance of day—the sky in all its fulness of light fading through a thousand colours into evening.

Always his mother sat with him in the afternoon, till the light was feeble and the high tea at six o'clock was served downstairs. Sometimes she would read to him, more often sew, while he lay there in silence and, though he never expressed it in words, when at the finish of her work, she collected all her coloured silks and laid them in her basket, yet he thought how like the coming of the evening that was—a tired woman laying aside her coloured silks until the daylight came again. There was one large ball of orange at which, once, when she was putting it away in her basket, he had said aloud—

“There goes the sun.”

Mrs. Furlong looked up.

"The sun, Dicky? It set long ago."

"The ball of silk," said he.

She took it out and smiled.

"It is like the sun—isn't it?" and then she laid it back again. She had never known of all he meant by that. Had he even known it himself? In those years Dicky's mind was being fed with food he never tasted. The clouds—a legion—which passed across the heavens every day before his eyes made but little conscious impression upon his mind. He merely lay and watched them. Sometimes they took shapes which filled his mind with stories. He saw wild beasts with jaws wide open which crawled the sky at evening. He saw Spain's great Armada, with sails full-bellied, come riding up the azure of the Spanish Main. He saw volcanoes on a far horizon, belching forth their mountain columns of smoke, which, when once lifted, hung in suspense like the vast canvas of some monstrous tent. He saw those fleets of little ships which face alone the length and breadth of all the endless blue. And there were days when not a ship was on the sea, and often then, with eyes that closed to the intensity of light, Dicky would fall asleep.

There was other food for Dicky's mind as well as this. For the first time in his life, he became the possessor of a real secret. There had always closed for him a mystery around his father and mother. It was not often that he was worried by it, but there were

times when he wondered about his father's childhood, how *his* father had treated him, whether he had done the things that Dicky wanted to do and if he had done them, then what had happened. But of all his life before he had taken the mill, that is, of all his life one year before Dicky had been born, Mr. Furlong was strangely silent. Dicky was not so curious about his mother's youth, but even she never alluded to it and, though he was not so old as that he might find it strange, yet questions had often risen to his thoughts, but he had never asked them.

One day when there were no ships on the sea, when the sky had no tales to tell him, he found himself looking long at his mother, who sat sewing in the window. He wondered how she could ever have been young; he wondered, too, if she could ever be old. And then he wondered if any of the boys in Mr. Leggatt's school at Eckington had mothers as beautiful as she. He went through them all, one after another. There were none. Not one of them could match her.

"Mother," he said presently, not taking his eyes from her face—"how old are you?"

For a moment she went on in silence with her sewing, a smile twitching the corner of her lips. At last she looked up.

"Why, Dicky? Why do you ask?"

"Because," said he, "if I'm ten, mustn't you be very old? I mean, you must be thirty, mustn't you?"

"Yes—and more," said she.

“And how old’s father?”

“I don’t think your father would like me to tell you his age, Dicky.”

“Why not?”

“Well—I don’t really know why. Anne asked him once and he said she must not be curious. Do you remember asking him how much money he made out of the mill?”

Dicky remembered well. He had been comparing the penny-a-week which he received in pocket money with the twopence-a-week which one of the boys got at Leggatt’s school. It was a matter seeming to him to depend entirely upon how much his father made out of the mill.

“That’s just what he said to me,” said Dicky; “he told me not to be curious.”

With a wonderful discretion, Mrs. Furlong went on with her sewing. Dicky knew he was not to be answered, yet no information had emphatically been denied him. Nevertheless, he was disappointed and turned his face to the other wall. There he lay for some minutes counting the roses on the wall-paper, plucking them and tying them into bunches to give to his mother.

Presently he turned again.

“Where did you live before you came to the mill?” he asked.

“At a place called Wittingham, in Buckinghamshire.”

"Was it as big as Eekington?"

"Oh—it wasn't a village," said she; "that was the name of the house."

"Did it belong to you?"

"No."

"Who did it belong to?"

"It belonged to Lord Wittingham."

"Was he your father?"

She laughed.

"No, my father was only a barrister, Dicky—just plain Mr. Tennant—that's all."

"Then why did you live in Lord Wittingham's house?"

She did not reply at once and her needle made the stitches just a little quicker.

"Dicky," she said suddenly, "if I tell you something, will you promise never to say a word about it—to Anne or anybody?"

Dicky made his promise, emphatically and at once; then waited with almost breathless interest.

"I was the governess at Wittingham," she said at last; "they had two daughters—Lady Mary and Lady Jane—I taught them. They didn't like me and I didn't like them."

"Why didn't you like them?"

"They weren't very kind—no one was very kind."

"Beasts!" said Dicky.

She smiled again, remembering how many times she had said it.

"No one was kind except your father. If it hadn't been for all the little things he did for me, I should never have stayed there."

"Did he live at Wittingham, too, then?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

For a moment Mrs. Furlong stopped her work. She laid it down in her lap and turned to look out of the window. The sun was on the water where it rushed over the weir. It lit the flecks of foam as they whirled in a race down the river. All the willow trees were golden now. They dropped their gold in brilliant reflections into the water. Beyond it all, beyond the gold and the reflected blue of sky, the black woods towards Little Cumberton were warm with orange and brown. But she saw none of these glories. There was rising in her mind only the picture of the big room at Wittingham where, when no visitors were present, she was permitted to lunch with the family. Vividly she saw them all, those dread people for whom she had had so little respect, yet of whom she had stood in such awe. But more distinctly than any one of them, she could see that figure of her husband as he was then, moving silently, attentively, attendant on their wants. In time she had become conscious of his personality in the household; a personality which was higher, it seemed to her more human, than those with which she was surrounded. Furlong, the butler, was a better type of man than his master. She had said that to herself many times before

she had dreamt what that personality might mean to her. He made things easier for her at Wittingham; paid her those numberless attentions with which a man in his position can make the life of a girl in hers more bearable than it might otherwise have been. He treated her as he would have treated a guest in the house. He even treated her better, and that when there was nothing she could do to repay him. When she retired in the evenings to the privacy of her little sitting-room, glad at last to be alone, he saw to it that there was nothing she could want. Flowers were always on her table; they were in her bedroom, too. It was some time before she discovered that he, quietly, unobtrusively, was responsible for this. She had found him putting a bowl of roses on her dressing table.

"Is it always you who send the flowers up to my room, Furlong," she had asked.

"Yes, Miss—I guessed you liked them."

"It's very kind of you, Furlong."

"Not at all, Miss."

She had thought of him then all the time as she dressed for dinner, wondering why men in better walks of life were not so considerate as he, and then, with hot cheeks, accused herself of snobbery.

"Surely, I don't think it's because a man's a butler—" she began aloud, but did not finish her sentence.

And so in time she seemed to forget his position. One day, when he had brought her some books from

the library, she had picked up one and asked him whether he knew if it were good.

"I don't read novels, Miss," said he.

"Do you read at all, Furlong?" she had asked.

"Oh, yes, Miss—a great deal."

"What?"

What had she imagined? Perhaps poetry of a jingling order—books of travel, even religious works.

"Carlyle is my favourite author, Miss," he had replied with no trace of boastfulness in his voice. "I'm fond of science too. But for real enjoyment of reading, I can't do better than—'Sartor Resartus.' That's the best book that ever was written."

"I've never read it," said she.

"Never read it, Miss; let me get it up from the library for you. Or I'll lend you my own copy, if you've no objection."

"That's very good of you," said she. "I think I should prefer your copy."

He had brought it then and there, and that night she tried to read the first few pages. In half-an-hour she laid the book aside and never thought of Furlong as a butler again.

It had been a week after this, when out in the country walking, some miles from Wittingham Hall, she had come across him in pursuit of botanical specimens.

To have spoken but a few words and passed on would have been churlish in the extreme. In their different

ways they were both alone in that household at Wittingham.

He gave up his search for the White Helleborina, and they walked together through the Buckinghamshire lanes while he talked to her of pistils and stamens, of stipules and corollas, explaining to her all the wonders of the sex of plants and how they reproduced their species.

By reason of the silent attention with which she listened, he thought she had been interested in what he was telling her. She had scarcely understood a word of it. Her interest had been in him. More than ever she was realising his superiority to his surroundings and one day, on another such occasion as this, she had frankly asked him.

"Why are you here at Wittingham?" said she.

"Well, Miss—I have my duty to do. It's my duty to support myself—it's my duty to do what I can for my father. He's an old man, fallen on bad times. He had a mill once. I should have been a miller too, but when I was about fifteen the mill failed. He had to give it up. A gentleman who knew us well took me into service. I've been in service ever since. There's nothing to complain about."

"But don't you ever want to do better? Don't you ever want to get back?"

"Oh yes—I want to do better. I shall do better. I don't know how yet, and in the meantime it's my duty to do my best for his lordship."

Here he proved himself. He was one of those men in this world who, by making a fetish of duty, succeed against all odds, only to find when they have reached the end of their days that they have missed the flower of life because an inordinate sense of duty has bidden them not waste the fruit. They discover then that the fruit alone has been their portion whereby their only consolation is the martyrdom they have borne.

In the support of his old father at considerable difficulty to himself, Furlong felt warm the sense of the sacrifice he was making. But how was Christina to know that of him then? A breath of romance had stirred in the lonely passages of her mind. She was a young girl, alone in the distressing solitude of a great household. This man had not been born to his position. A sense of duty—a high and noble sense of it—had brought him there. From the moment her mind had conceived of this, she let her heart go to all the whisperings of romance. He came to know in time she loved him and fought with himself against his love for her because he owed the fetish duty to his father. If they married, he would be compelled to give up his well-paid situation at Wittingham. It was doubtful whether he would get another with a wife. But in this case Nature was stronger than his duty.

One sunny morning when the sheep bells were tinkling on the high land above Wittingham, he asked her to marry him. It was then Christina had told him how she had inherited a small legacy, sufficient for him to

purchase a mill, and the tears had rushed into Furlong's eyes.

Strictly speaking then, the romance was hers, not his. When a woman marries, however slightly beneath her, you may with justice assume that while the man is firmly mounting by the steady rungs of a glorious ladder, she is borne upwards on the golden wings of Romance. As the wings of Icarus too, they mount higher than any ladder can reach ; but often they rise into the melting rays of the sun, only to fall to the solid resistance of the earth once more. It had been this way with Christina Tennant. After four years of married life, when both Anne and Dicky had been born to her, she came to realise that without imagination, without a sense of humour, no man can make Romance. The wings of that which she had made, had melted in the sun. She had come back to earth. The man who has no bad in him has very little good. The man who knows the intimate anatomy of all the flowers of the field, more often than not forgets to find them beautiful. When first Christina saw Joseph Furlong dissecting a flower he had brought back with him from the meadows, she knew what her mistake had been.

And all these things, long though they may take to tell, moved in a swift review before her mind as she gazed out of the window in silence to Dicky's question.

Should she tell Dicky what his father had been? There was a great longing in her heart to do so ; a longing to tell some one and perhaps Dicky most of all.

For young as he was, she found already in this son of hers a quality of understanding. There were times when he had anticipated her wants, proving even then an imagination which his father had never possessed.

And yet in those days at Wittingham, he had brought flowers to her room, had attended to all her little comforts. But it was possible that she would never be able to understand this, would never be able to so make simple her mind that she could see him as he was—the perfect servant doing his duty.

This longing therefore to tell Dicky everything was just the craving of her heart to be understood and, for some reason which she could not explain, she would sooner in that household have been understood by Dicky than by Anne. Anne was gentle, loving and thoughtful of her every wish; but there were moments when, thwarted in what she desired, Christina saw her husband in Anne's eyes. This had never been so with Dicky. Dicky, opposed, was swept by all that storm of anger which she had heard her father sometimes showed in his practice at the bar. Dicky was a Tennant, though she was too wise ever to say so. And so, because she knew this, she longed to tell him all.

When then she heard his question again—

“Why did he live at Wittingham?” she turned from the window on a sudden impulse which broke and fell as she heard her husband's voice in the garden below her. Was it fair? Had she not said enough?

“He just lived there, Dicky,” was all she said.

"But why did you take all that time before you said it?"

"Did I take a long time?" she inquired.

"Rather! Ages!"

"Well, perhaps because I oughtn't to be speaking about these things. I don't think your father likes it. So you'll remember your promise, won't you?"

"What promise?"

"That you'd never say anything about it. I'd rather people didn't know that your mother was only a governess. They might not think so well of your father."

In this one sentence she cleared herself of all blame. Dicky turned over on his side and began to pluck more roses from the wall-paper. He filled his arms with them and then looked back.

"I wish I could give you all the roses on the wall," said he, and for just his thought of it, impulsively she laid aside her work and kissed his eyes.

CHAPTER V

It was in those three weeks while Dicky lay, a usurper, in the big bed, that his spirit first bowed to the influence of a woman. Dicky fell in love.

There are many things a man must learn which a woman knows from the beginning. To love it seems is one of them. He does not learn it easily, moreover; makes many an essay, loses himself in many a pitfall before his knowledge be complete. And it is these trials, these efforts which contribute in so great a measure to the development of his soul. Maybe a woman is what man makes her; but that is a social tag, having reference only to her phase in life. He cannot touch her soul. But the soul of a man passes from the hollow of one woman's hand to the hollow of another's. And each one as it goes, with cruel fingers or with kind, leaves the deep impress of her hold upon its pliant shape.

Here then was the first to mould the life of Dicky; to turn it towards that setting of a purpose which makes the soul of man.

Dicky fell in love with his mother.

Now the first instinct of a man when he falls in love

is to make something that will outlive his passion ; to place it on record that the world may see how he has loved. A thousand times afterwards he may wish that thing destroyed, may loathe the staring remembrance of it, which for ever meets not only his eyes, but the eyes of that new woman into the hollows of whose hands he has newly placed his soul. But the thing has been done, the poem has been made, the song been written. He has created something—imperishable perhaps—which may live to mock him all his life through.

But if the thing be good that he has made, then love or no love, and whether a thousand new women taunt him with it to his face, he cares more for that thing than all the love and all the treasures in the earth. It typifies in one upraised memorial all love that he has felt. Indeed to work at making is the only way some men can love. Yet if it be the love is for themselves, for fame and all the riches that it brings, then they have built their house upon the sand and it is only worth that which the first rising tide will make of it. But if the love is for a woman, it can contain those qualities which are everlasting.

It was when Dicky first made something for his mother, that Christina knew he loved. Of all the fulness of that sense of loving, she did not understand. But it was a thing Dicky had never done before and, in the doing of it, she had just realised his passing from the wild savagery of boyhood to that first gentleness which shows the turning on a tortuous road.

For some days, whenever she came into the room, there was a scuffle from the bed in some effort to conceal. On the first occasion she had asked him what it was.

"Something I'm doing," said he, and a colour rushed to his cheeks in a flood of self-consciousness.

It would not be true to say she was not curious. When a mother finds herself loving her son with all that beating of heart which his father might have taken for himself, she is driven in curiosity by everything he does. But with an effort, Christina kept it to herself.

"Shall I know soon?" was all her curiosity asked.

"To-morrow," said he and then, when he added—"P'raps"—she smiled at her own pang of disappointment.

But the next day she was told. When she came up to the bedroom after the mid-day meal, bringing her work-basket under her arm, Dicky was sitting up in bed holding at arm's length a piece of paper from him, surveying it first this way, then that, at the greatest distance his arm could reach.

She stood at the foot of the big bed and waited, thinking in one swift moment of regret how soon he would be gone from those pillows, how soon she must return. This was the first time there had been no attempt at secrecy. She knew she was to be shown it then.

"Well, Dicky," she said. "It's to-morrow."

Then, with a sudden gesture, the hand thrust

quickly out, colouring again to the roots of his hair, he held the paper towards her.

"I've picked the roses for you," he said shortly and the next instant in a confusion of shame was hidden beneath the bed-clothes.

She looked at the paper he had given her. It was covered in drawings of roses from the wall—roses in bud—roses in full bloom. He certainly had picked them all. They were drawn in pencil, with faint shadings where the blush of the petals showed. It was the drawing of a child, with lines that trembled where they should be firm; but there was something in it all, a quality perhaps of infinite taking pains, which made Christina know there was no idleness.

Now just as a woman inspires, so swiftly does she know when her inspiration has been true. Something in Christina's heart at the sight of that paper, leaped up and swelled within her.

"I know they're rottenly done," said a tearful voice from beneath the bed-clothes, and then she came to her senses.

There is always the moment when a woman forgets the workman for the joy of the work. It is in a sense her own. But it is ever followed by another moment still, that moment in which the work is nothing and the workman all. At the sound of that tearful voice under the bed-clothes she had taken Dicky swiftly in her arms.

"Did you do it for me, Dicky?" she whispered.

He nodded his head.

"And did it take you all these last three days?"

He nodded his head again.

"But where did you learn?"

"We have drawing lessons at Leggatt's. Old Leggatt takes us himself."

She put the paper away in a book and that evening showed it to her husband.

"Don't you think it's very good, Joseph?" she asked.

He adjusted his spectacles and looked at it. After close examination he raised his head.

"I hope he won't want to be an artist," he said and he was about to tear the paper up. She took it quickly in her hand.

"You wouldn't tear it up!" she exclaimed.

"Why not, Christina? I don't want him to be encouraged."

"But why?"

"Well—I expect him to take on the mill after me. It's paying well now. Other mills are shutting up. In a few years it'll be a good property. It isn't every boy gets an open chance like this. Surely you must wish it too. It was your money that bought the mill. He couldn't possibly do better—besides it's his duty to me."

She put the paper away as she looked out through the window into a black, cheerless night. At that moment things were as black and cheerless in her heart.

She felt that there could be no hope for Dicky if this was all that lay before him. And yet, until that instant, she had never really supposed anything else.

"He must have something to amuse himself with while he's lying alone up there," she said presently. "He bears it very patiently, but he's not a boy who can do nothing. He must occupy his mind. I was going to give him some of my silks so that he could do these things with colour. I'm sure that would amuse him."

"Oh—I don't mind his sewing," said Mr. Furlong. "He'll never make that the business of a life-time. But I hope he'll never be an artist. I should hate to think that any son of mine was wasting his time like that."

"He might be a great artist," said Christina.

"Great artists are born," replied Mr. Furlong, "not made."

"Well—Dicky was born," she said, "I bore him."

"Yes—but you know what I mean," he replied.

However no objection had been raised to the coloured silks, and the next morning Dicky found himself with a needle, a piece of canvas, and the ball of orange silk, making roses as he meant roses should be made. He worked as though his life depended on it, struggling in difficulty with his injured hand.

Anne came upstairs to watch him. She felt all the envy that a woman does who sees a man at work.

"Red roses are much nicer," she said after a long silence—"and you don't hold your needle right."

"Everybody has red roses," said he.

She watched him a while longer and then envy could bear it no more. She sat down on the side of his bed.

"I tell you what we'll do, Dicky," she said, and there was excitement in her voice with the new idea, "when you're all right we'll have drawing lessons."

"Only on wet days," said Dicky.

"All right. I'll have the school. And you can bring your things and learn."

"What—you teach me?"

"Yes—we can take it in turns. I won't always have the school."

Dicky agreed and stipulated again that it should only be on wet days.

"I couldn't stick in the house when it was fine," said he. "Look here—can you help me out of bed—I must get out!"

"Why?"

"There's a heron there—I saw it go past the poplar—come on Anne—I must get out. It's gone down by the river—I bet it has. Help me out."

She helped him, but it was a tricky matter. The injured hand for the last two weeks had lain on the bed on a level with his body. It was now the colour of milk, and not a drop of blood was there. Whenever he got out of his bed that arm had carefully to be supported. But in his eagerness and hers they both

forgot this. The hand fell powerless to his side and, as the blood rushed through the unaccustomed veins, the agony was more than Dicky could endure. With a loud cry he fell back again upon the bed, shouting shrilly with the pain of it.

In a moment Christina was in the room, and Dicky was lifted back on to his pillows.

It was later in the day that Dicky heard how at that moment Wilfrid and his sister Dorothy had called to ask when he would be well.

"Dorothy heard you shrieking," said Anne, "and she began to cry."

"What a silly little ass she is," said Dicky.

CHAPTER VI

At the end of those three weeks Dicky was up once more. It was a fine day, the morning that he dressed and, on Christina's arm, walked slowly downstairs. This was not one of the days he would have taken lessons in painting at the hands of Anne. He begged to be allowed out in the garden.

Christina shook her head.

"I can go to the door, can't I?" said he.

She led him through the old square hall to the stout oak door—that same door at which, three weeks ago she had taken him so fearfully in her arms. As she thought of it, she shuddered, and yet, in those three weeks, indeed because of them, she knew that Dicky had become more to her, that she had become more to Dicky. In so contrary a world as this there is always something to be thankful for.

The Michaelmas daisies were still in bloom. Here and there amongst the dying leaves of the summer's flowers, left negligently to care for itself, the bright yellow of an autumn crocus cried out the everlasting fecundity of the earth. As you stood at the door, the dense laurel hedge shut out the view, but over the gap

where hung the white wicket gate, Dicky could see the glimpse of open country which he knew so well. The joy he felt as he stood there came to him in one sweep of delight. He did not realise that it was good to hear the rumbling sound of the old mill's wheel, to hear it untrammelled by four walls. He did not truly understand that the sound of birds in the open meant so much more than the muffled noises he had heard for the last three weeks. He only felt an overwhelming joy when the air of the country side blew gently on his face, and slipping his hand into Christina's, he said—

“By Jove—won't it be ripping next spring!”

“Do you mean the daffodils?” she asked.

“Everything,” said he. “I'm going to find that hawk's nest next spring.”

“But no more snakes, Dicky.”

Suddenly that brought it all back to his mind. He looked up at her quickly with a nervous smile, and the faint colour became fainter in his cheeks. Christina took him inside and closed the door.

She knew then how much a change there was in Dicky. In those three weeks, perhaps on that very morning so little a while ago, there had been aroused in Dicky the nervous quality of imagination. He could see things now he had never seen before. He could see the things which do not exist almost as plainly as those which do. Christina put her arm round his neck as she brought him into the sitting-room.

“What is it, Dicky?” she asked gently.

"Felt just a little cold," said he.

But Christina knew the coldness he had felt. It clings about the heart and makes the spirit shudder. She had often felt it at night as she listened to the water falling over the weir. She had felt it only that morning as she opened the hall door. When then he tried to make casual his voice for the answer, she tightened her fingers warmly on his shoulder, knowing how efficacious a touch like that can be to drive such cold away.

All that day he sat in his father's arm-chair by the fire in the sitting-room where in the morning Anne did her lessons. It was a great sense of importance he felt to be occupying that exalted position and yet every now and again his eyes turned longingly to the window. Every fresh gust of wind was carrying down great flights of leaves from the elm trees. They tapped against the window as they flew by and then sped on away into the garden, leaping and twirling as though they laughed at his imprisonment.

Anne sat silently and conscientiously before her books. He could see her lips moving as she committed the words to memory, and wondered how she could stay at it so long. There came a moment when he could bear the inaction of it no longer. He begged her to play a game. Where he, had he been Anne, would have leapt to the suggestion, she only shook her head. Still he persisted. Anne drove her fingers into her ears and her lips moved faster than ever.

"Oh—come on," said Dicky. "You aren't learning a beastly thing."

But Anne was faithful to her duty. She certainly was learning nothing. As fast as she repeated the words, they went straight out of her head. But there she was to learn her lessons and there it was her duty to stay. Yet Dicky prevailed.

"You teach me painting," he said, and to that she succumbed. Against all commands that he should remain quietly in his chair, Dicky went out of the room. To make reality more real, he was supposed to be passing a window in the street and, seeing there a notice to the effect that painting was to be learnt within, should stop, enter, and take up his course. With many gigglings, Anne wrote the notice on a sheet of exercise paper and rested it on the table against a book. Then Dicky entered.

Solemnly he walked round the table oblivious to the existence of Anne. If the second party in the game were enclosed within four walls, nothing on earth could make Dicky see them. At last the notice attracted his attention. Solemnly he stopped and read.

"Oh—Anne—what rot!" he said. "You might play properly." For on the paper was written—"Lessons in panting." And Anne shook with laughter at her little jest. "Do it properly now," he begged, for he longed to be at the painting he was supposed to learn. "I'll go out of the room again," he said. "Only do it right this time."

For the second time he left the room and would not feel the shaking weakness through all his body. When he returned the paper was in the same place ; the same detour was solemnly made around the table. He stopped again and read.

"Anne ! You are a beastly rotter. Lessons in putting on pants ! I don't call that funny a bit. I wanted to paint."

Suddenly then the strain he had put upon himself gave way. He stumbled.

"What's the matter, Dicky ?" cried Anne.

"I don't know," said Dicky in a whisper. "I think—I'm going," and he crumpled up like a tired old man and tumbled to the floor.

With half a sense of joy in her heart, Christina laid him back once more in the big bed, and when he came to, did her best to be cross with him.

"I told you not to move, Dicky," she said sternly.

"I was so sick of it," said he ; "and it made me mad to see Anne learning her lessons. She wouldn't stop till I made her."

Christina smiled, but hid it from him.

"What shall I do with you ?" she asked and, believing that there was nothing in the world she could do but what was kind, he answered—

"Play the piano downstairs this evening, before tea time."

At that she broke into laughter, as suddenly becoming serious again when she thought what Dicky would

be to women if he said things like that when he was a man.

She played that evening nevertheless. While the firelight was dancing on the ceiling and before they brought the lighted candles to his room, Dicky heard the notes of the piano come creeping up the stairs and through his open door.

At first they crept on tip-toe, like children stealing away from the house below to come up there and talk to him. Christina played the Moonlight Sonata. To the first movement of the notes Dicky lay back on his pillow and thought of that bend of the river Avon where it gurgles and whispers under the willow trees, and the water rats swim silently in and out of the weeds.

Suddenly the music changed ; the notes came tumbling up the stairs, bounding in through the open doorway, romping around his bed. Then Dicky sat up and thought of the water racing over the weir. He imagined himself in a boat that floated nearer and ever nearer to the fall. At last, with a crash of chords, it came. And then the house was silent. He turned his head and listened. Surely she would not stop then. But for a long while there was silence. At last the notes began once more. Christina played the Sonata Pathétique. Dicky lay back again upon his pillows ; upon the ceiling the firelight danced with silent feet, and round his bed the whispering children sang their songs to him until he fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII

AND the spring came round again to Dicky's waiting. The chorus of birds was almost deafening from the hedgerows; bread and cheese grew thick on all the hawthorns. Wilfrid and Dicky munched it as they walked across the fields.

Nothing had been said to stop their excursions in the early mornings; they kept them secret nevertheless. With parents you never know. Sometimes it seems they claim authority for the mere pleasure of its exertion. Dicky was never certain when his father might not lay down a law, and then only for the simple gratification of seeing it obeyed. So they kept their journeys secret. Only Anne knew at the mill, and Anne was staunch. In the worst of tempers there was no fear that Anne would ever tell. As for the gentle Dorothy, she would sooner have given up her life.

But something had gone out of the joy of these excursions to Dicky. A sense of fear had entered his heart, a fear of dark places, an unconquerable repugnance to the things he could not see. With the cleverest of excuses he avoided the woods, kept to the open

fields, and many a time came to the verge of a quarrel with Wilfrid.

One early morning in the spring of that year their quarrel came in earnest. They had traced a white-throat to a spinney near the river. Dicky refused to crawl into the undergrowth to find her nest. Wilfrid stared at him amazed.

"Well—I don't expect she's laid yet?" said Dicky.

"Why of course she has, you silly ass. Look at that robin hatched out last week."

"Better not call me a silly ass," said Dicky, who was only too conscious that he was.

"Well, why do you funk going into the wood?"

"Who said I funk'd?" asked Dicky dangerously.

"Well—you do," said Wilfrid.

There is no accusation more cruel than the truth. It stung Dicky to blindness. Before he knew what he had done, his fist shot out and Wilfrid was tumbling backwards from a blow in the chest.

No word was said then as Wilfrid came back with fists ready to his former position. Dicky knew it was to be a fight. But whereas last year he had fought fights with many odds, his back against a wall, laughing then at every one of them, he now found his legs trembling, his thumping heart accusing him of folly.

He was afraid. But why? Because he could see the blows in his imagination, one after another. He could see the red blotches on Wilfrid's face, the little trickle of red from a bleeding lip. He could feel the hot

blood streaming down his own face, and it seemed a barbarous thing to do. Besides which, it hurt. He felt the sting of each blow as it would fall and, as he squared up before Wilfrid's dancing body, he knew that he was a coward, devoutly wishing he had never struck the challenge blow.

But there was no escape from it now. This Wilfrid, who had always been afraid of him, must never realise how it had become Dicky's turn to fear. It was not the fear of Wilfrid himself; it was the fear of the fight. Still, he had entered it now. There was no drawing back.

In expectation of a rain of blows, Wilfrid waited with pumping fists in such attitude as he had seen in the pictures of many a boxer. But the blows never came. Dicky stood there before him with thin lips and white nostrils, his eyes burning as he watched the galvanic movements of Wilfrid's arms. In time Wilfrid had had enough of suspense. With a violent lunge, he struck out with his right. A great grunt came from him as Dicky parried the blow. Again he struck, again—right, left, and yet again. The last blow grazed by Dicky's cheek, and at the pain of it he answered back. But the aim was not at Wilfrid's face; full on his chest the blow fell like a hammer. He toppled backwards and found himself sitting ignominiously on the ground.

"Had enough?" said Dicky, as casually as he could between his breathing, fervently hoping that Wilfrid

would give in. But in matters such as these, young Leggatt was hard to convince. There was nothing horrible to him in a bleeding nose ; nothing there he need be afraid of. In a second he was on his feet again, and straight at Dicky like a windmill in a storm. It was he who rained the blows now ; yet through the rush and excitement of it all, Dicky never lost the sense of spectatorship. All the time he felt that he was looking on, powerless to let his anger carry him into the blind rage which sees and feels nothing. One more sharp interchange of blows and Wilfrid spun again from off his feet.

These blows on his chest were fast taking the wind out of him. But he was not hurt at all. The sight of Dicky's bleeding mouth gave him renewed energy. Again and again he came up to the point, and then at last, sent reeling backwards, lay in a bed of nettles by the spinney's edge, exhausted in defeat.

"Well—am I a coward ?" asked Dicky as he stood over him.

Wilfrid shook his head. He had no breath to speak. Yet in his heart Dicky knew well the fear that he had felt and, turning towards home, walked silently back to breakfast.

Anne sponged his face for him, but at the breakfast table Christina noticed the cut upon his lip.

"How did you hurt your lip, Dicky ?" she asked. †

"I fell," said he, and she knew he was not telling the

truth. She looked at Anne, but Anne was very busy eating porridge.

There was a long silence then ; full of dread to Dicky, who knew quite well that his mother had not believed him. At last Mr. Furlong looked up from his plate and gazed out of the window.

“We’re going to have a thunderstorm in a few minutes,” said he.

“Oh, Lord !” exclaimed Dicky, “my mustard and cress !” and swiftly left the room to go into his garden.

CHAPTER VIII

IN the spring of that same year there was food for gossip, sufficient to last them many a long day in Eckington. In one of those wild moments of madness which may overtake the gentlest of women, Mrs. Leggatt, wife of the schoolmaster, bought her own sorrow.

There lived in the house with them a young man named Allen, the organist at Pershore, teaching music in Mr. Leggatt's school. For many weeks, it transpired, Mr. Leggatt had felt suspicious. From doubt, ungenerously he had let it grow into conviction, and all with that secretive silence of a man who waits the proper moment for revenge.

It never occurred to him to save that gentle wife of his from the abyss on whose very verge she stood. It never entered his head to protect Wilfrid and Dorothy from their mother's folly. It was enough for him that the wretched woman had allowed the tide to catch her so far. To him all shame was then complete. He needed only the moment to trap them in their sin, and, for that moment waited, with eyes that smiled benignly upon all they did, yet watched with an alertness only men of cunning can possess.

Unconsciously, no doubt, he contributed towards her downfall, omitting those little attentions—the few, slight thoughts of her which are more than straws to a woman caught in such a tide as this—omitting them intentionally, and smiling, always smiling, when the young man did them in his stead.

With conviction growing stronger every day, at last he moved his room from hers and, for long hours into the night stood listening at his own door. For a week he heard nothing, yet still the miserable man was convinced.

“I have to go away,” he said one morning at breakfast. “I have to go up to London.” With a bitter exultation in his heart he saw the dropping of his wife’s eyes, and the swift look from young Allen.

Then, all jealousy realised and the white heat of anger burning in his blood, he smiled upon them and smiled again.

“You can take my classes, Allen,” he said cheerfully. “Keep an eye on that young Furlong. He’s not so wild as he used to be, somehow or other, but he needs looking after.”

Mrs. Leggatt packed his things. He found her crying as she struggled with the straps upon his trunk.

“What’s the matter?” he asked, and there was half a fear in his heart that she was going to tell him all while as yet there was not all to tell.

“My head aches,” said she. “Why can’t you get back again to-day?”

“What from London? All that distance? Besides—I must stay a couple of days.”

As he left the house, she put up her face to be kissed, and shuddered when he kissed her.

“It’s cold,” she said, and he was gone.

That night he returned—late that night. The house was in darkness. He crept upstairs. The door of young Allen’s room was ajar. He peered within. The room was empty. With silent steps then he made his way to the door of his wife’s room. That was closed; but stooping down to the keyhole he could hear voices, their voices from within.

With all the bitter joy of that triumph of jealousy, he made his way noiselessly out of the house, and in a few moments was at the vicarage. With difficulty at that hour he raised them from their beds. The night became alive with the sound of barking dogs. They heard it, those two, in their darkened room, and wondered what marauder was abroad.

“You must come with me,” said Mr. Leggatt to the Vicar; “you must be witness——”

The Vicar blinked his eyes.

“Witness to what?” said he.

And so next morning, Eckington and all the neighbourhood, even beyond Pershore, knew of Mrs. Leggatt’s shame, and whispered their pity for the poor schoolmaster.

Anne was alive with curiosity when she heard it. She knew, yet knew nothing—could understand, with all that

quivering instinct of a woman, but did not know what she understood. With a mind torn by impatience and curiosity, she came to Christina.

It is needless to say what she asked.

"But mayn't I know?" she concluded.

Anne was twelve. Christina looked at her thoughtfully.

"What's the good, Anne?" said she, "I shall tell you soon. You'll know quick enough."

"But Dicky knows," said Anne.

"Dicky knows?" Christina echoed.

"Yes—one of the boys at the school told him."

"Did Dicky tell you?"

"No—he said it wasn't the sort of thing for girls to know. But he's only ten."

Christina felt her heart shudder within her. Dicky knew. Dicky had taken the first step out of childhood. She could no longer look in his eyes and feel that she was looking into the clear waters of a running brook. The water was clear no longer. She wondered, with a heart that ached, if it were going to make any difference in her love for Dicky, but more, was it going to make any difference in his love for her. Dicky knew, and for one moment it was she who felt ashamed.

That evening when both the children had gone to bed, Christina opened the door of the sitting-room, sat down to the piano, and began to play Beethoven.

After a few moments Mr. Furlong rose from his chair and closed the door.

"Oh—why?" she said, and she took her hands from the keys.

"Those children won't get to sleep," said he.

"Oh yes, they will," said Christina, and she opened the door again.

"But, my dear Christina, they'll stay awake, and then they'll begin to think——"

"They'll think anyway," said she, "and I want Dicky to think of the music. That'll send him to sleep."

Mr. Furlong shrugged his shoulders and returned to his reading of wild flowers.

"It's always best," he thought, "to be lenient with women. After all, Dicky's a healthy boy, he'll get to sleep presently."

When she had finished her playing, Christina closed the door.

"Joseph," she said after a pause, "do you ever talk to Dicky about things at all?"

Mr. Furlong laid down his book and took off his spectacles. Curiosity just saved him from being annoyed at the interruption to his reading.

"About what things?" he asked.

"Well——" she smiled—she frowned. He might have known. "I mean there are boys older than him at the school. It was only I feel afraid sometimes that he might get a wrong idea of things, and—and—I thought you might have spoken to him—might just—have helped him to understand."

"But Dicky's only ten, Christina!"

"He's just eleven now."

"Well—when I was his age, I knew nothing about things—as you call them. My mind was clean and fresh without a thought in it beyond my games or my work."

"I know," repeated Christina; "but then, Dicky's not quite the same—you surely see that, better even than I do."

"I suppose you mean he's a Tennant and not a Furlong," said her husband and, putting on his spectacles again, he picked up his book. It meant that the discussion was closed.

"You don't think it advisable to say anything, then?" said Christina.

"Certainly not," he replied. "I hope I shall know my duty when it comes to me," and, in his prayers that night, he asked that his duty might be shown him. In the morning it had passed out of his mind.

But Christina had not forgotten. Long into the night she had lain awake, thinking of Dicky, thinking of Anne, thinking of Mrs. Leggatt. When the morning came, she woke early.

She, too, just saw the poplar tree that reached the window catch, and, with her head thrown back upon the pillow, could gaze at those shimmering golden leaves which trembled against the blue.

At seven o'clock Mr. Furlong rose and dressed, as was his custom.

"I hear that Leggatt's forgiven his wife," said he presently, when he saw her eyes were open.

"Forgiven her!" exclaimed Christina.

"A very noble thing to do," said Mr. Furlong, in surprise.

"Forgiven her!" she repeated, "oh—I think I never heard anything so cruel in all my life!"

"Cruel!" Mr. Furlong was amazed.

"Cruel—yes! Now I suppose she stays on at Eckington to face the terrible forgiveness of everybody else. Oh—I think it is too brutal for anything! Why did he go and call the Vicar—why did he let the whole village know?"

"I suppose at the time," said Mr. Furlong, "he intended to pursue a different course. No doubt she begged his forgiveness. Young Allen, of course, has been sent away. It appears Leggatt had been afraid of it for some time."

"Who said that?"

"Well—I believe he told the Vicar so. Mrs. Fastiff heard it from the Vicar's wife."

Christina's lip curled.

"If he suspected—why didn't he send young Allen away before?"

"I think it would have been better," Mr. Furlong agreed; "but of course that's a difficult thing to do. He couldn't have turned him out of Eckington. He couldn't have made him give up his post of organist at Pershore."

"Yes—but the horrible immorality of it! To stand by and watch it all—to trap her—to show her caught in the trap, and then—to forgive her! Oh—if I were

that wretched woman, what miles I'd put between myself and Eckington!"

Mr. Furlong looked at her in pain.

"My dear Christina," said he; "I hope you never will be like her."

The thought of it hurt him to the quick. He came across to the bedside, thinking suddenly that perhaps he was not so affectionate to her as he might be.

"Christina," he whispered, and bending over the bed he kissed her. She clenched her hands beneath the bed clothes as she returned the kiss.

That afternoon, when Dicky returned from school, she called him.

"We haven't been for a walk," said she, "since you were getting better."

"Well—come on," he answered eagerly. "Let's go to the hill. You haven't seen the place where the snake bit me."

The prospect of that had no pleasure for her; but they would get their walk.

It was one of those spring evenings that long have bid farewell to winter. In every ditch, in every hedge, the primroses were bringing forth the last clusters of their blossoms—a myriad candles leaping up in flame before they died away. In every bush, in every spinney, the birds were chattering in song; adding those last touches to their houses with all the care as if they should last for ever. In and out of the may trees the blackbirds flew in low and noisy flights. High on an elm tree a thrush sat singing to the dropping of the sun.

"Well—it's spring again, Dicky," said Christina, as they walked. "Do you remember last autumn—that day when you first got up—you said how ripping it would be?"

"Yes—I remember," he replied. "Well—it is—isn't it? You see me jump that hurdle."

"Dicky! You'll hurt yourself!"

But Dicky had gone. She closed her eyes.

"There you are," said Dicky from the other side.

"Splendid," said Christina; "but it looked so high."

"I can jump higher than that," said he. Pilgrim, who had tried the jump as well and failed, was quite ready to assure her that this was true. He could not keep his feet still.

"Don't try now," Christina begged. "Let's walk along together. Tell me about the birds' nests you found this year."

This kept him at her side—on wires, but still beside her. For a long, long while she listened with patient interest while he told her everything he knew of nature. They were garbled ideas, no doubt, of the laws of God; but she was unable to improve upon them. They sounded full of knowledge and observation to her. She found herself listening without hearing, all the while wondering what Dicky would really be when he came to man's estate.

"Shall you like going into the mill when you grow up, Dicky?" she asked presently.

Dicky dug his hands deep into his pockets and felt a great sense of importance.

"I haven't decided yet," said he, after some consideration. "Of course the mill's jolly fine. I could afford to get a box of water-colours then—couldn't I?"

Christina smiled, but the smile died away when she thought of that piece of paper covered with roses—the first thing that Dicky had made for her.

"Shall I give you a box of water-colours soon?" she asked.

In a moment he was hanging to her hand. In the belief that they were about to start running, Pilgrim was dancing at their side.

"Will you?" exclaimed Dicky; "will you really? Don't say you'll make no rash promises, like father does. Say you will or you won't."

"I will," said she, "I promise."

He covered the hand he held with kisses.

"I'll paint a picture one day," he said, "that'll make you cry."

How little he knew it, but he had done it then. Her eyes filled and were glitteringly bright. She had seen a vision of Dicky painting a great picture, and he had brought the vision to her mind.

But all this time there was hanging about her thoughts the remembrance of what Anne had said. To speak to him about this had been her express purpose for their walk. Yet now that they were alone together, she found the words all dry and clinging in her throat. Supposing to speak of it were only to raise more curiosity in his mind? He was so terribly young.

Joseph, no doubt, was quite right when he said that at Dicky's age, such things had never entered his mind. Was she quite right when she believed that Dicky was a different sort of being altogether?

It seemed to her, then, that she was on the verge of a great experiment. Should she attempt it or should she not? Her heart felt sick, for ever since they had started on their walk, she had heard herself say the words, yet knew she could withhold them still. In a sudden moment, then, she let her instinct carry her away; heard the words in the distance as they left her lips.

"Dicky," said she, "Anne told me you knew everything about Mrs. Leggatt."

Now they were said, and her heart stood still. She could hardly believe that she had done it. For some moments she dared not look at Dicky. They walked in silence side by side along the road. At last she could bear the suspense of it no longer. Her eyes cast down to Dicky's face. His cap was pushed back upon his head. His cheeks were scarlet. Christina wished the earth would open where she stood.

"Anne's a sneak," said Dicky presently.

Christina was swift to defend her.

"It was nothing to sneak about," said she. "I'm not angry. Anne wouldn't have told me if she'd thought it would make me that."

"Then what's the matter about it?" asked Dickie evasively. "They all know at the school."

"All of them?"

"All the bigger chaps."

"Yes—but Dicky—some of the boys are fifteen—you're only eleven."

"Well—I bet I know as much as they do."

Again they walked in silence. Christina's mind was so confused by this, she knew not what to say.

"Would you tell me what you know, Dickie?" she asked at last, and in her voice there was the gentleness of all the mothers in the world.

With hesitating words then, Dicky began his garbled tale and, as she heard it, Christina hardly knew whether to laugh or cry. He knew nothing. It was a fairy tale he told her. And yet, behind it all, she knew that life in Dicky had begun the turning of its tide. Something had wakened in him, just as it had awakened in Anne; something that she would never be able to set at rest, not with all the Beethoven Sonatas in the world.

She might have taken her chance then. The sleeping man had been awakened in Dicky; she might have taken him firmly by the hand and shown him the road in which he should walk. But that garbled fairy tale of Dicky's had deceived her. Really he knew nothing, and in her joy at the thought of that, she put her arms around his neck and hugged him to her.

"They didn't tell me right, then," thought Dicky. "I don't know after all."

In all unconsciousness, Christina had brought the real turning point in the tide of Dicky's mind.

CHAPTER IX

BEFORE many days had gone by Dicky had received the box of water-colours. These things will not wait. Openly at tea one day he had said how ripping it would be to carry on the mill and, hearing this, Mr. Furlong was no longer afraid that his son would become an artist. Now if Dicky knew what he meant by that statement, his father certainly did not. To a boy, the glory of manhood and its added glory of independence make matter almost for dreams. To Dicky, retaining in his imagination all the interests of his childhood, the idea of carrying on the mill implied the free pursuit of all his heart's desires. For the mill itself he cared nothing. For what it brought, he cared all. When then he declared how splendid such a prospect would be, this, and no more than this, was what he meant.

With the free permission, therefore, to use his box of water-colours, he acquired a new interest in life. The banks of the Avon are beautiful in those parts. Many an artist comes there. One half-holiday that spring, Dicky found a man seated down by the river, painting a picture of the mill, half hidden in the wealth of

apple-blossom where the orchards stepped down the sloping banks to meet the water's edge.

For half an hour Dicky had stood behind him, deaf to Anne's endeavours to lead him away. Not even her ultimate departure could stir him. He still remained behind the artist's stool, watching with growing interest every movement of the brush, every mixing of the colour.

"Do you learn drawing at school?" asked the artist presently, without looking round.

"Freehand," said Dicky.

"Dry stuff, isn't it?" said the artist.

"Rotten," Dicky agreed. "But I've got a box of water-colours now." The artist went on painting. "Anne's going to give me a sketch book," Dicky continued presently, "then I'm going to paint things—pictures."

The artist washed his brush and stood his picture against the trunk of a tree, regarding it with half-closed eyes.

"Better pictures than this, I hope," said he.

"I hope so," said Dicky simply, meaning no criticism thereby, for he thought the picture wonderful.

The artist looked round at him quickly. Up to that moment he had not given Dicky a thought.

"Oh—you think you'll do better than this," he remarked, for that half closure of his eyes had brought him satisfaction with his work.

"I wish I could," replied Dicky, "I wish I could do a billionth part as well."

"But you think you will one day?"

"I want to," said he ingenuously. "I told mother I was going to paint a picture one day that'd make her cry."

"P'raps you will," said the artist, and was so pleased with his reply that he enlarged upon it. "Quite a lot of people paint pictures like that. Young ladies do. I have a sketching class in the summer, and a lot of the girls who come round, paint pictures that make me cry."

"They must be very good," said Dicky, whose firm belief in the highest power of art was to make somebody weep. "That's how I mean to paint, anyhow," he added.

"You'll probably succeed," said the artist and, packing up his things, he walked away, generously sorry to find conceit in so young a boy.

But Dicky hugged this to his heart. The artist had said that he would probably succeed. The very next day he persuaded Anne to turn out the contents of her money-box, and a sketching book was purchased in Pershore. On the next half-holiday he went out with his book and his box of paints alone.

In its first inception all Art is imitative. The young man breaks his heart and writes a poem. It is not so much to ease his pain as because some great men before him have laid their broken hearts upon a sheet of paper. His only qualification to be a poet then is that trend of mind in him which makes him seek to imitate the poets that have been. When Dicky sat down with

his box of water-colours in the same place where he had talked to the artist, his only claim to art was that he chose to imitate it. The result had not one quality contained therein to commend it to the most far-seeing critic in the world. Even he knew that it was bad. He knew it meant nothing—nothing that he had seen. In a fit of anger, tore it up. Had any critic seen those ragged pieces of paper lying scattered on the ground he might have had hope of Dicky then ; but Dicky had none of himself.

He was cross all that evening and would not talk even to Christina.

“What is it, Dicky?” she begged of him as he was going to bed. But he was in the very first of those moods when the artist realises that God has made the world before him, and only by the greatest suffering can he hope to create one millionth part of it anew. In the mere submission to that mood, Dicky had made the first step upon his journey, that mad adventure which men will make as ever the ages go by, that wild pursuit of the unattainable which ever retreats as they advance until all power of following it be gone, and they fall by the wayside to watch the others in pursuit pass by.

“You must have eaten something, Dicky, to disagree with you,” said Mr. Furlong ; “what was it?”

In a vague knowledge that a definite answer would please his father better than doubt, with a touch of devilment beside, he said, “Some of Pilgrim’s biscuits.”

"Well—of course," exclaimed Mr. Furlong, "I should have thought at your age you'd have known better. You'd better go to bed and be thankful if you don't have nightmares."

When Dicky had gone, Christina bent close over her work to smile. She wondered, nevertheless, what it could be.

Notwithstanding his disappointment, however, Dicky persevered. To Wilfrid's disgust he spent every spare moment until the summer holidays making pictures, the majority of which he destroyed before ever he brought them home. A few there were he kept, and these, locked away within a drawer, were shown only to Anne, who criticised them coldly from a standpoint of her own.

When the holidays came, Dicky was sent away to stay with his uncle, Mr. Herbert Furlong, in Buckinghamshire. Anne went with him. Here was a farm, in the farmhouse of which the Furlongs lived. In the delight of that place Dicky forgot all his painting.

There is Romance in a farm, as there is Romance in everything. With a boat and a stream you can find all the Romance of battles by sea, of far discoveries. With a wooden sword and a cardboard helmet you can experience all the stirring Romance of war. The Romance of the world's traffic can live out for you in a tin engine and a piece of string; and in a farm—let it be but just one acre and one cow—there is the whole Romance of the world's providing. To find two eggs new laid in the early morning is as good as finding the

whole supply of a great market. To milk six cows in a stall, to send off one can of milk, to bring in one load of corn, one cart of hay, to make one pound of butter or one jug of cream is as good—if you are young enough to know it—as feeding the whole world in its hunger.

Dicky and Anne were young enough to know all this. For the first two weeks of their visit they lived in a paradise of Romance. Cumber Farm became the world in little, and Trafford Mill for the time was almost forgotten.

Yet it was here, in the joy of these surroundings, that Dicky passed through the most painful, possibly the most potent influence, in his life. There lived at Cumber Farm with them, a sister of Mrs. Herbert Furlong. Bertha Geddes was a strange woman—tall, of dark countenance, a pale face in which the eyes set deeply.

Whenever in after years those weeks at Cumber came back to Dicky's mind, ransack his memory how he might, he could not recall anything of Bertha Geddes during that first fortnight while he and Anne were at the farm. She was a silent woman, given to the reading of her Bible in the morning, taking long and lonely walks in the afternoon. They saw but little of her in those first few days at Cumber.

It was when their visit was drawing to its close that Dicky one day fell ill. He had been fishing for eels in the early morning, fishing for his breakfast—no breakfast can be so good. A hummock upon the bank on

which he was standing gave way. Dicky found himself above his waist in the water. These accidents will happen, but seemingly when they happen to children, there is a penalty attached. Dicky knew that it was a culpable offence and accordingly said nothing. The clothes were half dry on him by the time he returned to breakfast ; by taking a hasty seat at the table and concealing his wrinkled garments, he managed to evade detection. In two days he was in bed, and the doctor spoke of congestion of the lungs.

"I don't think you need worry," said he ; "there's nothing serious about it. Keep him to his bed—that's all."

Therefore, when Anne returned to Eckington, Christina had already received a letter to say that Dicky had caught a cold, and would have to be kept in bed for a few days.

"You needn't worry," wrote Mrs. Furlong. "He's a very good patient. I'll send him back directly he's well."

Christina fretted at heart when she thought of Dicky in any one's hands but her own. She tried to persuade her husband to let her go to Cumber, but he quoted the letter from his sister-in-law.

"I think it would only be waste of money," said he ; "he's being well looked after."

So Dicky remained behind at the farm, and Bertha Geddes undertook to nurse him. At some period of her life she had joined a hospital and spoke of remedies

for such complaints as Dicky's, which even the doctor had not mentioned. In that silent figure then that moved about his room, Dicky at last became conscious of a personality which occupied his thoughts even to the exclusion of his mother.

Whenever she moved him in the bed, lifting him more comfortably upon his pillows, he felt a strange shyness which, with the weakness of his body, made him tremble. There is no doubt she noticed this, and those slow dark eyes of hers watched him with unfailing observation. There were times when she put her hands about him, lifting him in bed for no other purpose than to see that trembling shyness shake his body in her arms.

In the mornings when his room was tidied, for with scrupulous care she attended to all these matters herself, Bertha Geddes would sit at his bedside, reading to him the passages she knew by heart from her Bible.

Upon Dicky this had a strange effect. He grew to loathe the sound of the Scriptures and yet, when one day she thought she saw his impatience and was prepared to stop, he begged her to continue rather than leave him.

"But I don't think you like it—do you, Dicky?" she asked.

For answer he just stretched out his hand and clasped hers.

"How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, oh Prince's daughter." So she read on from the Songs of Solomon.

After five days there came a letter from Mr. Furlong, inquiring of Dicky's health. When the answer was sent back reporting upon his rapid improvement, Bertha Geddes enclosed a letter to Mr. Furlong from herself.

"I am nursing Dicky," she wrote, "and want to tell you what a wonderful boy I think he is. God has assuredly marked him out for something great in this world. We read the Bible together every morning, and I try in my poor way to instil the example of Christ into his mind. One of these days, these quiet little mornings of ours will bear fruit. One never knows the seeds that fall on good ground. You can rest perfectly contented that he is safe and well in my hands."

Mr. Furlong handed the letter across the breakfast table to his wife.

"That type of woman," said he, "is very difficult to find nowadays. An influence like that will do Dicky a world of good."

Christina read the letter through and then in silence passed it back to her husband.

"We must ask her to stay here one of these days," said Mr. Furlong. And still Christina said nothing. But having got that idea into his head, Mr. Furlong embodied it in a short note to Dicky.

"When you come back," he wrote, "perhaps you would like to bring Miss Geddes with you."

But Dicky was not coming back just then. One night the servant negligently left open the window of

his bedroom. The next morning he was in a high fever, and the doctor was sent for once more.

"Unless it's serious," said Mrs. Furlong to her husband, "we'd better not let Joseph know. They'll think we aren't taking proper care of him."

So they knew nothing of this at Trafford Mill. A little more care was all the doctor commanded and, at some inconvenience to herself, Bertha Geddes had her bed removed into Dicky's room.

"I shall be able to watch him better," said she; "I shall be able to see that nothing of the sort occurs again."

Dicky's feverish eyes looked at her half in shyness, half in gratitude, when she informed him of what she was going to do.

"I shall come to bed and undress when you're asleep," said she, and that night knew he was awake but said nothing.

The next morning she read the Bible to him as usual. He lay with his eyes fixed upon her face, hearing not one word of all she said. It was whirling in his mind, the thought that she was more than anything in all the world to him, and the next night as both of them lay awake in the darkness, Bertha Geddes heard a stifled sobbing from Dicky's bed.

In a moment she was beside him.

"Dicky," she whispered, "why are you crying? What's the matter?"

"I don't know," he muttered, but with both his arms he clung to her wildly in a fresh passion of tears.

There they stayed then in silence—this little boy of eleven, stepping with trembling, unconscious feet upon the very edge of life—this little boy of eleven and this disappointed woman of twenty-nine.

“Won’t you tell me?” she begged again presently; “tell me what it is.”

“I love you,” whispered Dicky. “I love you better than anybody in the world.”

“Better than your mother?” she murmured.

It seemed to Dicky then as though life were more difficult than he could bear. He felt shame, he felt fear, he felt he knew not what beside. But to the sudden tightening of her arms about him, he gave way in a short, hysterical cry.

“Oh—better than any one in the world,” he cried, but he could not bring himself to say in actual words that he loved her better than Christina. Yet it seemed a great and magnificent thing, this love that had come into his life. No longer did he feel himself to be a little boy, but a man, before his years perhaps, yet still a man with love that burnt in secret in his heart. It was not his desire to know that she loved him. All that concerned him was to prove to and convince her of his love for her; that it was the love of a man, to be treated in all seriousness and with all respect.

And so, with trembling limbs, he lay close to her long through that night, kissing her lips, her eyes; whispering how much he loved her, in words pathetically childish, yet with all the meaning that he could give them.

Once she asked him if he were cold.

"No—I'm not cold," said he.

"Then why are you trembling like this?"

"I don't know," he replied, and trembled the more.

A week of such nights as these passed by. At last Dicky was brought downstairs, a convalescent.

"You mustn't let any one see," Bertha Geddes had said to him, "you mustn't let any one see that you're in love with me. They'd think it foolish, perhaps. They wouldn't understand."

"But when I'm twenty-one," said Dicky earnestly, "we're going to be married then."

"Yes—we're going to be married then," said she, "if you haven't got tired of me. Ten years is a long, long time."

"I couldn't get tired," he declared.

"You never know, Dicky," she replied. "This world is full of pain and disappointment. I always change the letter D into the letter H, and that word disappointment becomes His appointment."

Dicky thought her more wonderful than ever.

It came at length to the day of his return. They were to go up to London together and there Christina had persuaded her husband to let her meet them.

"You're going to come and stay, you know," said Dicky to Bertha Geddes. "Father said in his letter that I might ask you. I couldn't do without you now."

She smiled, patting his cheek, and together they went up to London to meet Christina. As the train steamed

into Paddington station, Dicky leant out of the window with eyes dancing for the sight of his mother. It was the great longing in his heart then that these two should meet. He knew that the one must love the other. He loved them both. At last, among the crowd upon the platform, he saw Christina. His handkerchief was ready in his hand. He waved it wildly about his head. At the instant of the train's stopping he had opened the door, descended from the carriage, and was running along the platform to meet her. At some little distance behind him followed Bertha Geddes.

"Oh—mother!" he exclaimed, "I do want you to meet her so. She's been so good."

Now what it was that stirred within Christina, not even Christina knew. Her eyes met the eyes of Bertha Geddes and, though jealousy was bitter in her heart, it was not jealousy that nerved her then. With horror that is inexplicable to itself, an animal will turn away from the dead body of its kind. It was so that Christina turned away from Bertha Geddes. When once their eyes had met, she caught Dicky almost roughly by the hand and, before he had had time to realise it, had led him away to a cab. The door had closed; they were driving out of the station before he realised what had been done.

The moment he understood he made a rush for the window. With fingers of steel Christina held him back. But he had seen his last glimpse of Bertha Geddes as she stood alone upon the platform.

CHAPTER X

THIS was the first and only rift in Dicky's love for his mother. But it was a long estrangement, lasting through six painful months in which Christina, never seeming to give way, won him slowly back into her heart.

She had forbidden him ever to see Bertha Geddes again and, though it was impossible for him to break this command, yet he kept burning the flame of his hysterical passion. They wrote to each other. Her letters came by arrangement with the first post in the morning. Dicky secured them from the postman before ever they had entered the house. The two pennies which he received in weekly pocket-money were both spent now upon stamps and, locked away with his sketches, he kept the letters she wrote him. Every night when he went to bed, he read them again and again. They were full of wise counsel, telling him how he might make his life. But it was where she wrote that she loved him that he read the words over and over again. At her conclusion, when she always ended—yours in Christ—Dicky closed the letter up. There was something in that termination which disinclined him to read again. Yet for six months his opinion of her never altered, his

anger with his mother remained the same. He did not try to bring himself to forgive her for what she had done. Yet with a patience that seemed almost inexhaustible, Christina waited, ever watching for that moment when he would let her take him back into her heart.

Almost every evening of those days, she played the piano when he and Anne had gone to bed. A thousand other things she did which might have seemed to Dicky to have no relation with him, for when he came to kiss her in the morning and at night, she offered her cheek in no way as she used. But the struggle within her to keep her arms from clinging round him was something almost beyond her power of endurance. There were days when, in anticipation of that struggle, she would leave the room before Dicky could say good-night, or purposely be late for breakfast in order to avoid this heart-breaking ceremony. Never was any wooing so determined as hers. When a man desires the love of a woman, all reason takes flight and leaves him ; but when a woman means to win a man, the power of cunning redoubles in her breast. A panther in pursuit of prey is not more stealthy in his movements, more patient or more watchful for the moment when he may spring.

"What is the matter with Dicky?" Mr. Furlong asked her one night when they were alone.

"Dicky?" said Christina, "he's in love."

Mr. Furlong laid down his book upon his lap and took off his spectacles.

"What nonsense you do talk sometimes, Christina," he said with irritation. "You want to make a man of that boy before he's in his teens."

"Do I?" she answered. "What a very little you do know about me. Why, I'd give all I know to keep him the little boy he was two years ago. A boy of nine has got all in him that a woman wants in a man. He's brave, he's true, he's got a code of honour all his own, from which scarcely any temptation can make him depart. He's chivalrous; he can love, and, with it all, he knows nothing. Life—what's called life—has never touched him then. His mind is as clean as a flower. It's women like that men sometimes marry. It's men like that women would give their souls to marry, but never meet."

Mr. Furlong gazed at her in astonishment. Never had Christina spoken out her mind to him like this before. At first he was bewildered. He could find in himself no answer to oppose her statement; something in it rang more true than he was able to refute. After a moment's silence, he returned to what she had said of Dicky.

"I suppose you know best what you mean by all that," said he. "I don't want to put you to the trouble of explaining it. But you can explain what you mean about Dicky. How can a boy who's not yet twelve be in love? Who's he in love with? Some little girl of his own age—Dorothy Leggatt, I suppose—or somebody like that?"

"No," she replied quietly; "nobody like that."

"Then who?"

"A woman of twenty-nine. A woman who has shown Dicky what it means to love, who only in a few weeks has killed all the childhood in him and made him the man you say I'm trying to make him before he's got into his teens. Dicky knows now—knows everything. She's told him everything there is to know. Oh, can't you see it, Joseph? And if you only knew how it was hurting me! I'd give my whole soul to win Dicky back again; to make him what he was just two years ago."

Mr. Furlong left his chair and crossed to Christina's side. Whenever she spoke with that pain in her voice all emotion in him was roused. In this way he had been moved when she had spoken so bitterly of the forgiveness of Mrs. Leggatt; now, again, he felt that perhaps he did not understand her as well as he might. He believed in the popular convention that no man really quite understands a woman, not grasping the fact that it is often because they are so concerned with the understanding of themselves.

He sat down on the arm of her chair and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"Who do you mean, Christina?" he asked gently; "it's not a woman in Eckington, is it?"

"Do you mean to say you don't know, Joseph?"

"No—you don't mean Miss Geddes, do you?"

"Of course I mean her."

"But, my dear child—she's a woman of twenty-nine!"

Besides, she's a good woman. Look at her letter to me."

"Do you think because a woman mentions the name of Christ that she's good?" asked Christina.

"Oh—but I can't believe any woman being so great a hypocrite," he replied warmly. "There doesn't live such a woman. Besides—she's my sister-in-law by marriage."

Christina rose quietly from her chair.

"We must say nothing to Dicky," said she. "That would only make it worse. I'm afraid even now he writes to her. I saw him early the other morning from the bedroom window—he was talking to the postman."

"Well—ask the postman if he receives letters," suggested Mr. Furlong. "We shall know then quick enough."

"Yes—and then Dicky will know, too. Please don't do that, Joseph. It would be terrible if he lost his faith in us. Promise me you won't do that. He's nearly lost his faith in me."

She recounted to him then their meeting at the station.

"He's never been the same to me since that day," she continued; "I know by the way he kisses me."

"What do you mean, Christina?" said her husband, suddenly realising that Dicky had consciously adopted an attitude towards his mother, and a critical attitude at that. Without knowing it, he felt it reflect upon the power of his own authority. "Do you mean to say that boy has the impudence to treat you with

disrespect ; to kiss you in any other way but what a son ought to kiss his mother ? I never heard of such impertinence. That boy wants a caning, and that's the first thing he shall have to-morrow morning from me."

Christina had been about to leave the room ; now she came swiftly back. Her eyes were full of apprehension. This was a danger she had not thought to find.

"Oh—whatever you do—don't do that !" she begged, and her fingers clutched upon his arm. "Think, if you cane him because he doesn't kiss me as he used, he'll never kiss me with love again. He'll hate you, but it'll be nothing to the way he'll hate me !"

"Hate me !" exclaimed Mr. Furlong irately ; "but I won't be hated by my children. It's the duty of a child to love his parents, not hate them. 'Honour thy father and mother—' I will be honoured, Christina, and so shall you."

Christina looked him straightly in the eyes.

"If you cane Dicky to-morrow morning," said she slowly, "I shall come and wrench the cane out of your hand, and you'll never see me in this house again."

She left him with those words and went to her bed. Mr. Furlong stood in the middle of the room gazing at the closed door and wondering what the world had come to.

"A boy of eleven !" he muttered, as he went back to his chair, and strive as he might, it was all beyond him. "A boy of eleven !" he repeated protestingly. But he could say no more than that.

CHAPTER XI

It was impossible that this should continue for long. It marvelled Christina that it should have lasted with Dicky as it did.

But next year's spring saw an end of it. Dicky's love for Bertha Geddes cooled. With a seeming malicious humour, Nature sometimes kills her highest emotion with the cheapest and most worldly weapon she can find. There came a day in April when the warm winds were blowing the shadows of the clouds over Bredon Hill; when in the meadows down the valley, the cuckoo-flowers were laying out their fairy carpet in the sun. Dicky wanted a new sketch-book then, and Anne's coffers were empty.

"Why don't you save up yourself?" said she.
"You're always asking me for money."

"I want my money for something else," said Dicky.

"For what?" said Anne.

Dicky gave her no reply.

"You needn't tell me if you don't like," said she;
"I know."

"But you don't," he answered quickly.

"Bet I do. It's to post your letters to that woman."

How did she know that? He seemed inevitably to be confronted with this strange way women had of knowing things. How had his mother known about Bertha Geddes? She must have known to take him away that day as she did on the platform—known without ever having seen Bertha Geddes before. For by this time he knew he had been doing wrong—knew with that animal instinct which has no power of reason. What sort of wrong it was, or why it should be so, he did not understand. It had never been entered in his category of sins; yet intuitively he knew it should be there.

It was the first realisation of this which blew a cooling breath upon his infatuation. Shame is a great factor in one's life when one is as young as Dicky. In the first heat of their separation, Dicky would have cried out his wrongs to the whole world. But as the months went by and he received those letters of good counsel wherein the name of Christ was so freely used, a sense of shame began to creep into his mind. The secrecy in writing those letters of his became more necessary than ever. He had been cunning before in order that he should not be prevented; now he was cunning lest he should be found out.

Love cannot prosper in such an atmosphere as this; and when the demand of a new sketch-book first brought cessation to the writing of his letters, the matter was ended then. Dicky was in love no more.

How Christina found it out it would be almost

impossible to say. An idle word from Anne, a sudden look from Dicky, and she knew all that was taking place. Morning after morning she watched from her bedroom window down the road. The postman came up to the wicket gate alone. She learnt that Dicky was only getting up, and had not yet been out.

Then it had come at last, this hour for which so tenderly and so patiently she had been waiting. Dicky was free again, and she knew full well that Dicky could not do without love. For love is a food, the manna in this wilderness of ours; and once a human creature has tasted of it, none other can so well sustain him. Without his letters to write, without his letters to read, without the numberless thoughts of Bertha Geddes which for the past six months had filled his mind, Dicky was now disconsolate. He refused the companionship of Anne. He ignored the friendship of Wilfrid. It was the moment when Christina knew her chance had come. With a sure hand, she took it in her grasp.

It was one afternoon in the early part of May when Christina saw Dicky set off alone with his sketch-book. By the wide-open window of the best parlour she had been playing the piano that morning—the most joyous of Chopin's Preludes. Every glad note of it was in her heart. The world seemed as young again as did the year. And as she had played, it suddenly was brought to her senses that all the birds in the garden were silent. She had lifted her hands from the keys. For an instant

everything was still until they took up the burden of the music she had laid down. Her eyes and lips had turned to sudden smiles, and——

“Oh—Dicky,” she had whispered.

It was when she saw him start out alone in the afternoon that she went hastily to that watch tower, the window of her room, stood there until she knew in which direction he had gone, and then put on her hat and coat.

No one saw her depart. Mr. Furlong heard the snap of the catch on the wicket gate, but when he looked out of the mill, Christina was hidden behind the bushes of laurel, already on the road to Bredon Hill.

She walked slowly, for it was not her wish to overtake him at once. She meant silently to come and sit beside him while he was painting one of his little pictures; those pictures of which he had never made a present to her, not since the day when he had picked the roses from the wall-paper in her room. The apple orchards were all in bloom, the may trees massed with the pale green of a million breaking buds. Her step was light, her head high. You would have thought her a girl of twenty-one had you come up behind her on the road.

She was less than twenty-one that day. No little maid going to meet her lover could have been lighter of heart than was Christina then. And when she saw the slight figure of Dicky on the hillside, her pulse stood still, then raced away—a canter in her breast. Like the little maid again who goes to meet her lover, trembling

in the thought that that day perhaps she will be kissed, Christina's hand shook; her breath came short and quick with the hasty beating of her heart.

She made a wide detour to reach him, and for some moments had lost him from her sight. When she came within view of him again, she found he was quite close. Then she stood still. Dicky was lying flat upon his chest, his head in his hands, his shoulders shaking. On the ground by his side a few scattered pieces of paper were lying in idle confusion.

At the sound of her sudden footsteps, he turned round and sat up. His eyes were red. The smearing lines of tears were on his cheeks. At the sight of him there alone upon that hillside Christina thought her heart would burst.

"Dicky!" she said. "Oh—Dicky—are you so unhappy as all that?"

With a brave gulping, he swallowed his tears. There was yet his pride to be broken down. It was with him strongly then.

"I'm not unhappy," he said. "How did you know I was here?"

"I saw you," Christina replied. "But you've been crying."

He pointed to the torn-up scraps of paper on the ground.

"It's no good my trying to paint," he complained with bitterness, "I do them worse every time."

Christina took that willingly as the reason of his

tears. It was probable she knew the aching of his heart far better than he did himself.

"Put the pieces together," she whispered, "and let me see."

In fear lest she should do it for herself, he raked them together quickly in his hand and thrust them in the pocket of his coat.

"No—please not," he said, "it's so silly."

He was a difficult lover, this Dicky of hers. She wooed him first this way and then that. And all the time, when he thought she was not looking, his eyes would wander to her face. There would creep over him the longing to throw his arms about her neck. Christina was not ignorant of what was passing in his mind. Time and again she gave him the opportunity he sought ; but like a timid colt in an open field, he kept shying at it, just when she thought she had won him to her heart.

Perhaps it made the struggle all the dearer to her soul, the conquest all the greater when it was won. For at last, in a beating silence, while they both looked out over the far country, his hand stole into hers as it lay upon her lap. Christina swallowed something in her throat. She could not have been certain whether it were laughter or whether it were tears. The next moment she knew, for his arms were tight about her. It was both.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Dicky was thirteen, Mr. Furlong sent him away to school in the north of England. Here a friend of Christina's was headmaster of the grammar school in the town and certain reductions were made which enabled Dicky's father to meet the greater expense.

"You'll only have the mill when I die, Dicky," said Mr. Furlong. "All money that I save will come eventually to Anne, so you must make the best advantage you can of the education that I give you."

Dicky promised to do his best. He would have made a world of promises rather than continue at Leggatt's school. The thought of leaving Christina was certainly disturbing when it came to him; but in the desire to see new worlds, he put it from him as often as he could. There were times at night when, lying awake, listening to the sounds of the piano in the house below, Dicky realised how nothing in this life was gained without some loss to counterbalance it. In time to come he was to learn still yet a wider knowledge than this; he was to find that no success is won without some failure made; that when a man shall fail, he may be nearest to success.

There would be no sound of a piano as he went to sleep at that school in the north. This was one of the things he must lose. But by degrees he made up his mind to that. Already he was entering that phase of stoicism when to be manly in everything is the heart's desire of a boy.

For a ransom he would not have shown to Anne or even to Christina, the doubts that sometimes threatened all his joy at going away. Sometimes Mr. Furlong thought him callous, and Anne wondered, believing he had no heart. But for the few days before he left, Christina watched him narrowly, growing in jealousy of life until she knew. Then she comforted herself with that sorry counsel which bids a woman tell herself that hers is not the only heart left aching. She knew that Dicky felt his going. He had all the heart she needed for him and for herself. If he were brave, what could she be but proud? And so these two acted their little comedy of deception—Dicky for the sake of that vague and elusive virtue called manhood, Christina for the reason that most women are brave, in order that some man may keep up his heart to the last.

At last the day arrived for Dicky's departure. Christina drove him in the trap to the station at Pershore. It was the same trap, the same horse which, two years before, had sped one morning into Eckington. At the sound of the horse's hoofs upon the road, Christina remembered that morning, thinking how many changes had come to Dicky since then.

At the moment of parting from the mill, Dicky had held his head high. He had wanted merely to shake hands with his father. This is one amongst the first signs of manliness when a boy realises that between men, a shaking of the hands is all that is consistent, even with the greatest parting in life. But this had ruffled Mr. Furlong's sense of the fitness of things. He was not the man to understand so fine a point as this.

"Aren't you going to give me a kiss, Dicky?" he asked, but there was more command than question in his voice. He was thinking of what Christina had told him when Dicky was at enmity with her.

Dicky obeyed, but the blood was hot in his cheeks. Yet Mr. Furlong was satisfied. The principle of obedience meant a great deal to him. Even the feeling that Dicky was annoyed did not make bitter the kiss he had received. He had been obeyed. It was, however, that sensation of annoyance which helped Dicky through much of the trial of parting at the mill. He kissed Anne without flinching, though the tears were perilously near her eyes. Over Pilgrim in his barrel in the yard, he felt the wrench worst of all. Pilgrim was so sublimely unconscious of what was taking place. He believed that Dicky was going to take him out for a walk, and danced in such a wild exuberance of spirits that Dicky realised another pleasure in life which he was leaving behind him. There would be no more walks in the early morning with Pilgrim. He set his teeth and turned away, looked once round the yard with

all its familiar sheds and corners, and then came back to where the trap was waiting in the road. Then he caught sight of the new hat box, containing the tall silk hat which he would have to wear on Sundays, and, setting his teeth again, swore bravely beneath his breath that he would not cry.

This was all very well so long as he knew that Christina was still with him. It was when the trap had been spinning along the road for some distance, and not a word had passed between them, that it was suddenly borne in upon Dicky's mind how soon he would even be parted from her. Tears in a volume then had almost taken him unawares. He held very tight on to the handrail at his side and swallowed quickly, trying his utmost to think of other things.

The whole country-side as they passed was yielding to the warmth of summer. A luscious note was in the song of every bird, and all the trees were swollen in their pride of leaf. The river gurgled through the rushes, while, up and down the glittering water, the martins sped in rushing flights that swept them out of sight beyond the bend.

As they approached the old stone bridge at Eckington, Dicky sat up in his seat.

"There's old Wilfrid," he said, "waiting on the bridge."

"Who's that with him?" asked Christina.

"Oh—that silly little ass Dorothy, I suppose."

Despite the trouble in her heart, Christina smiled.

There was something healthy in that brief summary of what Dorothy Leggatt was to him.

"Good-bye, Dicky!" Wilfrid called out as they went by; "write and tell us about the cricket."

"Course," Dicky shouted back. "You write too."

"You never said good-bye to Dorothy," said Christina.

Dicky looked back a moment over his shoulder. Dorothy was still standing on the bridge with Wilfrid, looking after them. The long strands of her dark brown hair were blowing out in moments as the wind caught it.

"She isn't a patch on Anne," he replied as he turned back again, and therein lay his answer to Christina's statement.

As they drew near and nearer to the station, Dicky became more and more uncomfortable in his seat; Christina's lips set to a thinner line.

"Can I get a funny paper?" he asked as they walked into the station. Until it was time for him to get into his carriage, he was so restless that Christina had difficulty in keeping near him.

At last he stood up in the doorway of the carriage, while the last luggage was being thrown into the vans. He looked down at Christina below him.

"Will you write to me about everything, Dicky?" she asked.

He nodded his head.

"Write every week?" she added.

He nodded his head again. It would have been very dangerous to speak just then. His grey eyes were glittering suspiciously already ; his lips were closed very tight. There was an unnatural pallor in his cheeks. After those few words of Christina's, they said no more but, whenever their eyes met, each looked quickly away. There came the moment when the doors of the carriages were being slammed. Christina put her foot on the step, raising herself on a level with Dicky's shoulder.

"Good-bye, Dicky," she said bravely.

"Good-bye," said he, and his voice cracked. The sound of it was unmistakeable, but he looked at her with a wry smile, the last effort he could make, and—

"That must be my voice breaking," said he.

"Oh, Dicky!" she exclaimed. "How soon you'll be a man!"

It was just that sentence of her's which sustained him until the guard's whistle was blown and the train moved away from the platform. After that it was an easy thing to lean out of the window and cheerfully wave his hand to Christina all the while that hot tears were tumbling down his cheeks.

CHAPTER XIII

AT that grammar school in the north Dicky began to learn the things which Circumstance builds to make the corners of life. He made few friends. For most of the boys there, he was far too old. Often he wondered what they would think of him if they knew all his secrets; how he had loved a woman of twenty-nine before any one of them were good enough for the first fifteen at football.

In those days he must have been very old, for he kept that secret to himself, when many another boy would have boasted of it. But one friendship there was he made which, at such an impressionable time as that, meant much to the moulding of his future. Mr. Hollom was the master of the upper fourth, a man more suited to the study than the schoolroom. Amidst a lot of boys, he was like a shepherd without his dog. Strive or storm as he might, he could not keep them in order. The moment he entered the room, he was at their mercy. Only in the constant fear of those sudden visits of the headmaster were they amenable at all to the studies that he set them. Once when the headmaster was away, they reduced him to tears.

He was a young man of twenty-three, made for a

scholar, with ill-set shoulders, a stooping back, and spindle legs. He never played in their games on the football field. They made their judgment by that and, on this occasion, when no danger of a visit from the headmaster was imminent, they played with him as a cat plays with a mouse. Trap after trap they laid ; trap after trap he fell into, and then a rippling tremor of laughter would quiver through the class. At length, when he upset an ink-pot which had been cunningly placed behind his elbow, the quiver of laughter became a shout.

With burning cheeks, and flinging back the long sleeves of his gown, Mr. Hollom jumped down from his desk.

“Who put that pot of ink at my elbow?” he cried.

The biggest boy in the class, the heaviest forward they had in the first fifteen, a boy who could never in his life have been so ingenious even with a pot of ink, rose at once to his feet.

“Plea-sir—I did, sir.”

Before he knew what he did ; before he considered its consequences, Mr. Hollom swung round his open hand across the boy’s face and dropped him with a stinging cheek into his seat.

Through the whole class then there was a moment’s hush. But instead of being satisfied with what he had done, the next instant the wretched man was a slave to its reaction. He stood there with white lips, his eyes nervously twitching, his breath coming fast. He gave

no impression of control. There was no sense of deliberation in what he had done. In a moment there was not a boy in that class who did not know it, who did not murmur approvingly when Butcher primus leapt up again to his feet with squared fists and a look within his eyes which some of them there had reason to know too well.

"If you want a fight, sir," said he, "we can have it here, or outside—whichever you like."

That had been the moment to repeat the blow; repeat it with calm and calculated deliberation. Instead, Mr. Hollom said that he was sorry and, when the class broke up for the hour of dinner, he remained behind seated in his chair.

Five minutes later Dicky came back quietly into the room and found him with his head in his hands leaning forward dejectedly upon his desk. Instantly, though he had been amongst the worst of them, Dicky went up to his chair.

"Don't cry, sir," said he.

As though it were a sting from another of these hornets, the young master lifted his head, preparing to face them again.

"What do you mean, Furlong?" he demanded.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I thought you were crying."

"And you were as bad as any of them—weren't you?"

"Yes—sir."

He turned away.

"My God!" he muttered thoughtlessly; "they'll never keep me on after this!"

Then realising the words he had used, he turned quickly again to Dicky.

"I suppose you heard what I said then?" he asked.

"Yes—sir," said Dicky. "And I wouldn't stay to be cheeked by Butcher primus, if I were you."

Mr. Hollom smiled.

"Oh—wouldn't you?" said he; "what would you do?"

"I'd go to another school."

"With the reputation of being unable to keep order amongst boys? What school do you think would have me?"

"But you're awfully clever, sir."

Somehow or other the incongruity of talking to this little boy of thirteen did not make itself clear to Mr. Hollom. Without his knowing it, it was the same quality of understanding Dicky had once proved to Christina which was showing in him now. The fact of the matter was, it was good to speak to any one.

"Boys don't want to be clever," replied Mr. Hollom. "It's no good having brains. Brains won't teach boys. You want the fist of a prizefighter, and the nerves of a prizefighter too, to teach a pack of boys. The brains you can get for yourself out of a book."

"But I want to be clever, sir."

"Do you? What do you want to do?"

"Paint," said Dicky. "Pictures."

"What sort of pictures?"

Dicky shook his head.

"Don't know yet," said he.

"Do you learn drawing here?" asked Mr. Hollom.

"Only a rotten sort of freehand," said Dicky.

"Well—I wouldn't despise it if I were you. It'll teach you little or nothing about shape, but it'll do what it purports to do—it'll give you a free hand with a pencil."

Dicky looked thoughtful.

"I didn't know it meant that," said he, and in one moment had grasped the first principle of education. Many boys may do this, but few apply the knowledge they have gained. Dicky applied it. He wasted no more moments in the drawing classes when they came.

The next term Mr. Hollom invited him one day to his rooms to tea. Dicky's heart was big with importance when he went. He was shown drawings and sketches that Mr. Hollom had done. In all the gentler arts, he dabbled in a *dilettante* way; played the piano, acted on speech days and, late in the night, wrote stories which the London papers occasionally printed in their columns.

Dicky thought that he was the cleverest man he had ever met. His portraits of boys that he sometimes drew in school were wonderful. Dicky recognised them all. But it was in his landscapes in water-colour that Mr. Hollom liked himself. Mostly to him they represented

long, peaceful hours in the sun, by the bank of some river or the rise of some hill, far from the penitentiary of school. When he had painted those pictures, he could look his God in Nature in the face. He liked them for that reason; he liked them, too, because, when mounted and placed in little gold frames, he thought they looked rather well. He was not ashamed to put his initials to them and hang them on his walls. His landlady had the good taste to like them too. She wished her daughter could paint like that, and had asked him one day to give her a picture. Concealing both pride and pleasure, he had promised that he would, but not even then had made up his mind which he could spare.

All these he showed to Dicky, saying: "Of course I never took lessons, so they're naturally very poor. One of these days we must go out together and see what we can do."

"Next Wednesday, sir," said Dicky, answering to the suggestion as the report of the pistol answers to the trigger that is pulled.

Mr. Hollom smiled. He was not quite so keen as that himself.

"Isn't there a football practice next Wednesday?"

"No, sir."

"Nothing at all?"

"No, sir."

"Very well, then," he agreed, "next Wednesday. You've got a box of water-colours, have you?"

"Yes, sir—my mother gave me it, birthday before last."

"And a sketch-book?"

"Yes, sir."

"And a stool?"

"I can sit on the grass, sir."

On Tuesday evening, Mr. Hollom looked out his paraphernalia, his leather satchel, his stool, his best sable brushes, and his expensive water-colour paper. The next day then they set out, telling each other all they knew about the history of nature as they walked. Mr. Hollom found that he had made a companion who interested him so much as to take him out of himself.

As soon as they had selected a place, they began to work at once. In less than half an hour Dicky had finished.

"I can't do any more, sir," he said, and he threw his book on to the grass by his side. "It's all started running—it's just a beastly mess, that's all."

Under great persuasion he showed it at last. The master took it, saying cheerfully—

"Well now, let us see."

Then, for a time that seemed to Dicky interminable, he was silent.

"Why did you make those near trees there that funny grey?" he asked at length.

"They're willows, sir."

"Yes—yes—I know that—but why that colour? Willows are distinctly green."

"Not when the wind's blowing their leaves back," said Dicky at once.

"Yes—well—perhaps that is so. But they're only occasionally like that. You ought to paint them as willows, and therefore should paint them surely as you most often see them."

"But it's windy to-day, sir."

"Yes, I know—but you're not trying to paint the day—are you?"

"I was trying," said Dicky.

Mr. Hollom smiled.

"You might as well say," he suggested, "that you were trying to paint the wind."

"But I was, sir."

"You try and paint the wind?"

"Yes, sir—it's as much there as the willows—well, it's everywhere. The willows are only by the side of the river."

"Furlong," said Mr. Hollom suddenly—and then he stopped. He was about to say—"Furlong—one day you'll be a great painter."

"Yes, sir," said Dicky.

"Oh—nothing," said Mr. Hollom.

CHAPTER XIV

WHATEVER Destiny it was which shaped the ends of Dicky Furlong, it never faltered in its course. Some Destinies there are, shaping the ends of men, which seem at times to weary of their labour, casting aside their tools because the work is dull. Upon some men even it would seem that Destiny never laboured at all. She passes them by in the great counting and, like straws upon a stream, they drift in whatever direction the eddies carry them.

But the Destiny that shaped the soul of Dicky Furlong never rested. Who is there to say why Mr. Hollom that morning was reduced to the dejection of tears? Was it to be of that service to him, which only some far-seeing Providence could arrange? Or was it to be in the service of that young animal who, with squared fists, drew from him his pitiable apology? Yet the only seeming benefit it brought was to Dicky, who thereby made a friend.

That Wednesday afternoon was the first of many which Mr. Hollom employed in taking Dicky out to sketch. He never told him what he thought of his future. There was a vein of common sense in him,

unusual in so young a man. To the headmaster, however, he ventured to speak his mind.

"Of course I may be quite wrong, sir," he said, "but it seems to me that one day he might do anything with his brush."

"Let me see one of his paintings," said Mr. Blaithwaite.

"You wouldn't gather anything from them," replied Mr. Hollom. "It's not so much the effects he gets, it's the effects he tries to get. They're mere daubs, of course. But I try my hand at it in a small way, and I shouldn't dream of attempting to paint what he does. The whole secret of art is expressing the moments of everlasting things. It's only in moments that things are everlasting. I asked him what something was that he showed me the other day, and he said: 'When the wind's blowing very high and there are a lot of clouds in the sky, their shadows keep racing across the meadows—' 'Well?' said I. 'Well,' he said, 'that was what I wanted to do—only it looks all wrong.' Movement, mind you—movement in shadows! Fancy a boy of his age trying to do that! Of course the result was ludicrous. But if he sees it like that, he'll get it. He's always trying to paint the wind as he calls it. And one of these days he'll do it."

"How old is he?" asked Mr. Blaithwaite.

"Just fourteen."

"His mother was a capable woman," said the headmaster; "played the piano beautifully when she was twelve."

He wrote home to Christina that night.

"Would you like your boy to be an artist?" he asked.

Christina wrote back as it were in a whisper, saying she would, but begging him not to mention it to her husband. The next vacation Mr. Hollom was asked to stay at the mill. Mr. Furlong was more than agreeable. The young man played chess and played it well. They sat long together in the evenings over the chess-board, but Mr. Hollom seldom won. He was listening to Christina playing Beethoven.

"It's a funny thing," said Mr. Furlong one night, just after he had declared check-mate; "but I've noticed amongst chess-players, that when a man is a good musician too—they sometimes go together—he's generally a most vicious man. There was a young organist here at Pershore—young Allen—he was a good chess-player. You don't play the piano—do you?"

Mr. Hollom gave out his lie with a truthful face.

"Oh—no," said he.

"Neither do I," said Mr. Furlong, but then he spoke the truth.

Those evenings of Beethoven at Trafford Mill lived long in Mr. Hollom's memory. In the three weeks that he was there, he discovered a secret in his heart. He discovered that he loved Christina. What is more, she discovered it too.

They talked often and long together about Dicky. A secret there was already between them. Dicky's father must never know that one day he might be an

artist. She firmly instilled into Mr. Hollom's mind that he must never tell Mr. Furlong that. Now a secret, even of so harmless a nature as this, is a fatal bond between any man and woman. It necessitates glances of understanding which are swift to be read to other things. Sometimes they would take long walks together, talking of Dicky all the while. It was in his appreciation of Dicky's future that his intelligence showed to the best advantage in Christina's eyes. She knew the value at that moment that he was to Dicky. Therein lay Christina's snare.

One evening, when Mr. Furlong was compelled to drive into Eckington to see a farmer about some corn that was to be delivered at the mill next day, she played Beethoven to him as usual. Really it was to Dicky lying upstairs in his bed that she played. But a man in love can lose sight of these things. He can confuse the real meaning of the smallest incident. Mr. Hollom lay back in a deep armchair, his thin legs stretched out straight in front of him and, with clasped hands and closed eyes, he listened to the last dying chords of the first movement of the Moonlight Sonata, believing that she played it for him. Then, as Christina came to the door, he knew he was in love.

He rose quickly to his feet as he saw her standing there. To a woman who, after some years of marriage has forgotten them, they are always pleasing, such little attentions as these. She begged him not to move.

"Is that all you're going to play?" he asked, for he

realised by then that he feared her near him in the room.

"Yes—that's all," said she; "I'm tired to-night. And that piano! It's rather sad—isn't it? I wonder if I'll ever have a really good one."

"In a few years," said Mr. Hollom, "Dicky'll be selling a big picture for some hundreds of pounds—then he'll give you one."

He prophesied the gift to Dicky; but in his heart he was longing that he might say: "Let me save up all my money and buy you one."

And as yet Christina had not guessed. Her eyes lit up with excitement at the thought of the prospect he had raised.

"Do you really think that'll ever be?" she asked. "Do you think he's going to be as great as that?"

"Of course it's all very speculative," said Mr. Hollom guardedly. "How can one possibly say? The things he says and does now are just those sort of things which are quoted of a man's childhood when he becomes great. He must become great for them to mean anything at all. They may mean nothing but a certain amount of precociousness."

"I suppose he is precocious," said Christina. "I've always known that. Ever since he was eleven."

They sat in silence then, and in the square hall outside, the old Cromwellian clock that had been in Mr. Furlong's family past all memory ticked out its hollow moments in ironical contrast to Mr. Hollom's

ears to those pregnant moments within himself. He felt as though every instant he must clasp Christina's hand in his. Nothing had he known it was more unlikely. He sat there quietly in the deep armchair, a slave to the doubt of what she would do, obedient also to a better impulse which keeps a man from stealing until his hunger be too great.

The sound of that clock outside in the hall, the sound of the silence there in the room, drove him at last to speak.

"Once upon a time," said he, "they thought I was going to be clever. I did well up at Oxford—wrote for their magazines—wrote for the Oxford papers. They printed an article of mine in the *Saturday Review*. I followed it up with another in the *Hibbert Journal*. I thought I was rousing the world then. I seemed to hear it echoing with what I'd done, resounding with all I was going to do. Now I'm a schoolmaster at a hundred and twenty pounds a year—completely, hopelessly unfit for my job."

"No!" interrupted Christina; "how can you say that? Look at all you've done for Dicky! You've encouraged him in his painting more than any one else in the world could possibly have done."

"Even if that were true," he replied, "and willingly I'll take it to my credit if you like—but what have I done for myself? Imagine what it is to be a man of twenty-five at the beginning of your career, as they like to call it, yet at one and the same time at the end of

it. To see the years a thin, gaunt, failing line drifting away into nothingness."

He buried his face in his hands, just as he had done that day in the class-room when Dicky had come to his aid. So now Christina came. With an impetuous and a full heart she leant towards him, and with her hands took his hands from his face. For some long moments they looked into each other's eyes, and then before Christina knew—she knew.

As long as he dared, he bore it, realising that this was the first and the last time he would feel the touch of her hand.

"Please take your hands away," he said at last.

Knowing, she took them away quickly—not knowing and in surprise, she asked him why.

"Because I love you," he said quietly. These he knew were his last moments in that house. A mood of desperation was with him then. It was going to be the one glorious moment in his life, this hearing himself say to Christina that he loved her.

"I know I have no right to say this," he went on quickly. "I'd only ask you to try and imagine that I have said it of some other woman—telling you about it as I would make a confidence. I know no other woman in the world I'd sooner make a confidence to than you. So I'm just telling you that I love a woman, and the mere telling of it is going to be the best moment I've ever lived. With all the knowledge of my failure, I love her. With all the dim hope of what for her sake I

might still be able to do, I love her too. It means nothing to me that she belongs to some one else. Marriage is a property act, it protects the jewels we possess, the pictures and the books that we have bought. But it cannot prevent a man from standing outside the case in which that jewel is kept and loving that jewel as I love you—in all admiration, in all respect, in all devout obedience.”

He rose slowly to his feet.

“Now I’ve told you,” said he, “I can touch your hand again—if, of course, you’ll shake hands with me. To-morrow morning I shall go. Good-night and good-bye. I shall look after Dicky at school. He brings you to me. I can’t do too much for him to show my gratitude for that. Good-night.”

The ticking of the clock became louder as he opened the door; it died away as he closed it again. Christina sat on in her chair staring far through the wall before her.

Half an hour later, when Mr. Furlong came in, he found her still seated there.

“Not in bed yet?” said he.

She shook her head and rose to her feet. At the door she turned.

“Mr. Hollom says he has to go to-morrow,” she said.

“Oh—I’m sorry for that. He’s a good fellow.”

“Yes,” said Christina, “he is.”

The stairs creaked under her as she walked up to her bedroom. She counted them one by one.

CHAPTER XV

SORROW is a great master. No man truly learns the lesson of life without such a teacher as this. For though there is pain, as well there is gentleness, and when the day comes that time has healed, then Sorrow has taught, and a man may go out into the world with a new knowledge in his heart.

Dicky began his lesson at an early age. At the end of his fifth term, just as his heart was rising to the anticipation of his holidays at home, Christina wrote to say that she would not be at the mill. A sister of hers—a worker, too, as she had been—was lying alone in some wretched lodging house in Dublin at the point of death. Christina had gone over the sea to nurse her. It was that going over the sea which made it seem so far away to Dicky. He came back to the mill feeling that, in her absence, the real meaning of his holidays was gone.

Anne did her best to cheer him—Anne, growing now swiftly towards that moment when she was to put up her hair and be a girl no longer. But it was the consolation of Christina that he needed. At the end of that term he had failed miserably in a Cambridge local examination. The only subject in which he had passed

was that of chemistry, a subject to which his inquisitive mind had quickly taken. In all classics and mathematics, his papers had been beneath contempt.

His father had written sternly but justly to say that he saw no purpose in keeping him on at school.

"You are well over fifteen," he wrote, "at that age I left school with, I hope, a better equipment than you have now. Through Mr. Blaithwaite's kindness, I am not paying the full amount for your schooling and, therefore, since you are doing so badly, cannot in justice to him impose upon his kindness any longer."

It was that last sentence which burnt into Dicky's mind. He tore the letter up. Whenever Mr. Blaithwaite's eyes rested on him, he felt the blood hurrying to his cheeks.

In such disgrace as this, the consolations of Anne, given with her whole heart, though sadly limited by her imagination, were of no avail at all. He needed Christina and, in her absence, was driven to the company of himself. For long hours of the day he would wander alone across the hills that overhang this valley of the Avon, watching the winter mists rise up from the river's edge like ghosts of the summer that had passed away.

A phase of morbidness was coming to him then. He wondered how long they would search for his body across the hills, if one night he died there, far away from the mill. He wondered would his father be sorry if he found him dead. From his coat pocket, where

he always carried it, he would bring out a bottle of ether which he had stolen from the laboratory at the school. He would smell this, thinking how quiet and easy it would be were he just to lay down on the grass, saturate his cap and lie with his head upon it till he slept. There would be no awakening—no dull grey morning in an empty house.

In the midst of these days of depression came the disquieting news that Christina had caught typhoid fever and had been taken to the fever hospital in Dublin. Mr. Furlong was asked to come over at once.

Even in the short time in which he was preparing for his departure, his face grew thin and pinched. His eyes fell into deep hollows and, from them, looked out in fear and apprehension. Dicky and Anne moved silently about the house, afraid to watch the things he did. And then he was gone. The house was more empty than ever. Certainly the common fear drew them closer together. They walked to the hills; they walked far across the country. But they had little to say.

"Should we have to see mother if she died?" asked Dicky once.

Anne shuddered.

"How can you talk like that, Dicky?" she exclaimed.

"I don't know," he replied. He did not know. He could not appreciate the meaning of what he said. He only knew that he could not bear it.

But in a few days there came better news. Christina was getting well. There was still some danger, but her improvement was constant. Dicky's heart rose up and, like a lark in early spring, tried with beating wings to lift above the surrounding mist.

They heard at last that she was approaching convalescence ; had, in fact, been moved to a convalescent home, but was looking so fragile that they would scarcely know her. A date was mentioned when they might return. Upon that day, Dicky's mind swiftly fixed itself, seeing there once more the breaking of the sun.

Two days went by in silence, and then from Eckington on his red bicycle came a telegraph boy. He brought a telegram addressed to Anne, standing by while she read it, watching her face, for he knew the news it bore.

Christina had had a relapse. The danger was worse than it had been. Anne turned away with a sense of dread and went alone to her room. Dicky went down to the river, where for an hour he stared into the water. The tears were never farther from his eyes. They glittered like glass, but it was not with wetness. His mind was already steeling itself for his bitter enmity with God.

It was Anne at length who found him by the side of the river and, in her common sense, begged him to come back home to their meal. They sat then down to table, eating little and in silence. Dicky made numberless

pellets with his bread, building them one upon another in a pyramid on the table before him.

When the meal was cleared away they took the two big armchairs, with books upon their laps. Neither read a word from the printed page before them. And the clock in the hall ticked and ticked and ticked. At last the hammer rose and it struck the hour of nine.

Dicky sat up suddenly in his chair. His face was grey as ashes. The pupils of his eyes were large and black as coal.

"Anne," he said in a hoarse voice. "I'm sure mother's dead. I'm sure. I'm sure."

CHAPTER XVI

DICKY's vision had been a true one. Almost at that very hour the soul had quivered from Christina's body. She lay quite still in Mr. Furlong's arms and when, with bowed head, he saw the nurse leave the room, he knew that he was alone.

The next morning the telegraph boy came once more to the mill. Anne took the yellow envelope, but could not open it. She turned away with it in her hand and the sickness at her heart overcame her. Dicky took it from her and tore the paper.

"I knew," said he strangely, and gave it back to Anne.

The telegram had contained an order for mourning, and ended with the words: "Get mourning and come Dublin at once for funeral."

The sudden necessity for so long a journey was a salvation to Dicky and Anne. There was no time for thought, no time even for comprehension. They must go and at once.

When the question of expenses was gone into, it was found that Mr. Furlong had not sent enough money. Only by travelling third class and steerage on the boat,

by having no meal over the journey of sixteen hours, by buying nothing in the way of mourning, neither gloves, nor ribbons for Anne's black hat, only by this could they make the money just suffice to bring them to Dublin.

"We must do that then," said Dicky, who talked without tears as one who talks in a dream.

It was blowing almost a gale from the north-west when they reached Holyhead that night. The rain whipped and stung their cheeks as they both, with the cardboard boxes containing the few things they had brought, walked down from the train to the landing-stage. In the violent gusts of wind the flames of the lamps were blown to a blue light, whistling and hissing in the semi-darkness.

Neither Anne nor Dicky had ever been to sea before. The boat seemed like a great hotel. They could see the rich people entering the saloons which were glittering with lights and looked, to Dicky, like a glimpse he had obtained through the windows of one of the hotels in London. But these places were not for them. When they showed their tickets they were hustled into a fore part of the boat, the few bunks in which were already taken. The rest of the space below the deck was occupied with crates of fish yielding a strong odour. They were piled one upon the top of the other, leaving narrow passages to the companion-way leading to the deck.

Dicky clutched their cardboard boxes very tightly,

for people in Eckington had warned them that they could never know whom they might meet on a long journey such as that. Soon there was a loud clattering as the gangways were cast off, a busy hurrying of feet upon the deck above them. At last the deep note of the siren vibrated through the ship and a shudder passed through all the passengers at the thought of the night they had to face.

A man looking round about him for some one to speak to, saw Dicky's eyes in his direction and said, with chattering teeth, "It may not be bad over the other side."

"Are we off?" asked Dicky.

"We are indeed, sorr," said a sailor; "but shure 'tis only two hours and three quarters—ye wouldn't be mindin' that. If we're up to time that's what we'll be doin' ut in. But I'm afraid we'll be late. They say 'tis blowin' the best part of a gale off the Kish."

"I thought it was generally smother that side," said the man with the chattering teeth.

"Well—ut is an'ut isn't," replied the sailor ambiguously; "it dipinds on the wind."

He spat on his hands cheerfully and looked at Dicky.

"It dipinds in the number o' knots in the wind," he repeated. "Did ye ever hear o' knots in the wind before, sorr?" then he saw the look in Dicky's eyes as the first wave struck the bows and the ship lurched out into the night. He bent down to Dicky's ear.

"D'ye want to be sick?" he whispered.

"I'm not going to be sick," said Dicky bravely.

"Well, thin, go up on deck and I'll find ye a place close to the mast. Ye'll be sick down here as shure as wather runs."

"I can't leave Anne," said Dicky.

"An' who's Anne?"

"My sister—she's over there—sitting on that box."

"Lave her be there," said the sailor wisely. "'Tis no help for ye to be staying with her."

Dicky crossed with difficulty and asked her.

"Would you like to go up instead of me?" he inquired.

Anne shook her head.

"I'll just stay where I am," she said and, in a moment of calm, the thought of Christina came to her, driven away the next instant as the whole ship quivered beneath a wave, the lamps rattled, and the sound of toppling feet shook in her ears.

On deck, Dicky found a few passengers huddled together by the companion-way.

"Just wind yeer arm around this belaying pin," the sailor told him. "Ye may get splashed, mind ye. But shure what harrm, 'tis salt wather. I'll come back presently and see how ye're gettin' on."

He reeled away then into the darkness, balancing for one moment in absolute stillness, then struggling onwards out of sight.

Dicky was splashed indeed. As the bows sank down into the trough of the sea, the waves flung over her and

the wind carried the spray of them like pellets hurled from a catapult across the decks. In less than ten minutes he was drenched to the skin. One by one the passengers around him left their posts and went below. But Dicky remembered what the sailor had said, and clung determinedly to his belaying pin on the mast.

That was a night that lived forever in Dicky's memory. He knew all the time that Christina was dead, but either the knowledge had come too suddenly, or his surroundings were so strange, which ever it may have been, he could not bring his mind to think of it. This sudden facing of God in the wind, this roaring battle with the sea, occupied all his thoughts. Beyond the realisation of his surroundings, he was dazed.

There was no light in the sky; there was no light across the sea. They ploughed onwards through the everlasting darkness. When the waves had drenched him through so that he felt the water trickling down his body inside his clothes, then Dicky began to believe that the world was a terrible place—a chaos of shrieking sounds. For the shrouds rattled like pistol shots against the mast above his head; the ventilation funnels screeched as the wind swung them round in its madness—the whole ship tossed and moaned like a woman in her agony, and Dicky wondered if it would ever end.

His hands had lost all feeling. Only with his arms could he still cling to the belaying pin that he held.

At last, after what had seemed a time of hours, the sailor came back to him.

"She takes the wather well—doesn't she?" he said cheerfully.

Dicky nodded his head, not knowing what he meant.

"Is ut yeer first visit to Ireland?" the sailor continued, but Dicky never heard a word. The wind had caught the sentence from the sailor's lips and flung it far out into the night. He repeated it, shouting in Dicky's ear.

"Yes," Dicky shouted back.

"Are ye goin' to stay long?"

"Only a few days."

"Shure what the hell's the good of crossing a night like this if ye're only goin' to stay a few days? Ye ought to see some av the country—'tis a fine place. I say what the hell's the good?"

So they shrieked into each other's ears. Presently the sailor pointed to a far-off light.

"That's the Kish lightship," said he. "They're havin' a damn fine tossin'. We shall only be half an hour late after all."

When they came in between the heads and reached the harbour of Kingstown, Dicky was a shadow of himself. His eyes were dull and sunken. A fit of shivering had caught him. His teeth ached and chattered in his head. He found Anne below guarding the two cardboard boxes. She had been sorely ill, but now, in the smoother water was the better for it. When at last they found their carriage in the Dublin train, they sat close together under the flickering oil lamp,

and then Anne, touching his coat, found out that Dicky was wet through.

"Oh, Dick," she whispered, "I wish you weren't so wet."

"It doesn't matter," he replied. "Don't you worry—we'll soon be there."

But he found that last half-hour in the train the longest time of all. Only that he dared not give way, even before Anne, he would have cried to God to let it all end and at once. For this was not only the suffering of physical discomfort; there lay also behind the consciousness of his mind a sense of terror, of foreboding, which as yet had taken no definite shape. Christina was dead, but he had not come to the absolute realisation that the world no longer held Christina; that when he asked for her she would not be there to answer, that there would be no longer sounds of the piano in the evening at the mill. His whole attitude of mind was that this was some fearsome nightmare, real enough while it lasted, but out of which there must ultimately be awakening.

With a tearing of brakes and a groaning of springs, the train at last came into the station at Dublin. Anne looked out of the carriage window for her father. He was standing there on the platform, a black figure with drawn cheeks and bloodshot eyes. She began to understand it all then.

As she stepped down from the carriage, he kissed her; in silence took her arm affectionately, and led

her away. For the first moment for many hours, Dicky felt the hot blood in his face. There rose no pride in him then. He had been ignored, left behind and, with a trembling lip he followed silently behind them. He questioned his mind for no reason for this injustice. Whatever he had done could not allow of punishment—of such punishment—at a time like this. With all the strength of his being he cried out inwardly against God and his father then. This was more than he could bear.

Suddenly Mr. Furlong turned round. Anne had said something to him. He came quickly back to Dicky.

“My dear boy,” he said—there were tears falling from his red eyes—“I didn’t know—not till Anne said something about you. You see I only meant Anne to come, she was the eldest. I only sent enough money for her. She says you’ve had nothing to eat. Why didn’t you speak? I should have seen you then.”

Dicky did not explain why he had kept silent. It still remained. He had not been expected. In a vivid rush of his imagination he saw all his life an intrusion now that Christina was dead.

“I’m not hungry,” was his reply.

“Hungry or not,” said Mr. Furlong, “you must eat something.” And in his voice, the quickness of Dicky’s ear detected even then the note of authority.

But for the rest of that time in which they remained in Dublin, Mr. Furlong was gentle as a child to both

of them. Taking Dicky aside from Anne as they walked to the Convalescent Home from which the funeral was to take place, he told him with quivering words of the last moments when Christina was alive.

"She had never been very religious, Dicky—not very. She was a true, good woman, but when she died, I think she knew—I think she knew the love of her Maker."

"Did she say anything—about me?" asked Dicky.

"Yes," said Mr. Furlong, "her last words were——"

"Were what? Were what?"

"Just—Dicky—Dicky—Dicky—three times, like that."

The poor man's heart ached as he told them. He had known then; known how much more Dicky was in the world to her than any one else beside. He would eagerly have kept that secret to himself; but the same night, upon his knees, he had prayed for help to reveal it, if revelation there were in the recounting of Christina's last words.

"It must be my duty to tell Dicky," he had said to himself. Once he was convinced of that, he followed his duty to the last. The only ease he found from the pain of it was when he considered that it was not necessarily his duty to tell it to Dicky before Anne. Anne need never know.

After a long silence as they walked together, Dicky summoned the courage to put at last the question that had been occupying all his mind since their arrival.

"Shall we have to see mother before she's buried?" he asked. The first thankfulness he felt for anything that day was when he heard that they would not. The coffin had been sealed. The light of day would never fall on his mother's face again.

When he first saw the coffin being lifted on to the hearse, his mind vibrated with imagination. In that he could not see with his eyes, he had been saved the terror of death, yet that case of polished oak, with its gaudy brass fittings, made no obstacle to the vision of his mind. It was his mother's body only they were lifting on to the hearse. He saw her face, with eyes closed in sleep, as plainly as last he had seen it when awake.

Two wreaths of white flowers were laid upon the coffin. Dicky wondered what she would have said if she could have seen them; wondered if she would have cared that flowers should die with her.

At last they started from the Convalescent Home to the cemetery, the hearse, on the driving seat of which sat three men, followed by the single closed carriage in which Dicky sat with his father and Anne. They sat in silence. It reminded Dicky of the moments when they walked up the aisle in church to the Communion Table. He could not feel that it had anything to do with the loss of his mother. It was a strange ceremony that rather kept his mind from the thought of death. He felt no sympathy with it, as often he felt no sympathy with going to church.

The three men upon the hearse looked really sorry.

He felt grateful to them for that ; but then he vaguely believed that they must have known his mother before she died and had no wonder that they looked as they did.

Yet all this time, no tear had ever come into his eyes. He saw Anne sobbing in the corner of the carriage ; he saw the tears trembling upon the edge of his father's eyes. He knew why they were crying, but could not cry himself. It was only when, as they passed along a narrow road, that a crowd of urchins, playing in the gutter, flung up their caps in the air, shouting "Hoorah ! Hoorah !" in shrill treble voices, it was only then that a rage of anger broke the flood gates of his heart and, burying his face in his hands, he let a fit of weeping shake his body through and through.

After the service in the chapel, not one word of which he heard, they went out into the garden of the dead. There, in the midst of many white tombstones, a great pit had been dug in the earth. He steeled himself with clenched hands as he watched the gaudy coffin being lowered beneath the ground.

"How soon that brass will get green," he thought, and then he turned away. He could bear no more of it.

When he saw him about to walk away, Mr. Furlong laid his hand gently on his arm.

"Dicky," he whispered, "the service isn't quite over yet."

Dicky looked in his father's eyes. There was no

answer to that gaze of his. He could see and hear no more. Mr. Furlong let him go. They found him later in the chapel, racked and torn with the storm of his weeping.

As they drove back again in the carriage, Mr. Furlong leant forward and took both their hands.

"My dear children," he said brokenly, "you've lost your mother. Nothing can ever repair that loss. But you've still got me, and I'll try and be mother and father to you both."

CHAPTER XVII

THE next two weeks at the mill were days of the greatest suffering that Dicky had to bear. It was there, in the familiar places, that he found the true loss of his mother. Her chair had been taken away from the table when they sat down to meals. The arm-chair in which she used to sit in the evenings remained, but no one occupied it. Its very presence tortured Dicky's mind. At night there were no sounds of the piano. The house was still.

Mr. Furlong would read his books of wild flowers, or sit with the pages of Carlyle before him in silence until they went to bed. In these days Dicky was working his apprenticeship at the mill. The even monotony of the work was already jarring at his nerves. All his imagination was fettered in a chain of regular undeviating hours. He was a slave—as we all are—but recognised his slavery. The realisation of it brought a bitterness to his soul. There were no moments of the day or night when he could find release.

In the gentle duty of his heart, Mr. Furlong had promised to be mother and father to them both. Never was a man more incapable of any but the paternal capacity. The memory of Christina sometimes rose in

a flood of tears to his eyes, but only when her name was mentioned, or some actual incident took place which vivified the knowledge of her absence. He did not miss her in the long silences of the day. God knows how much he may have missed her in those long silences of the night.

But with Dicky it was in the rushes of his imagination that he felt the want of her most of all. He grew thin and a pallid look came into his cheeks. He was fighting against greater odds than many a boy is ever called upon to oppose. Mr. Furlong one day remarked upon his health.

"I don't think you take enough exercise, Dicky," he said. "Go out for walks—go out for walks with Anne."

Anne slipped her arm into his and asked where they should go, but Dicky went alone. He began then to think about his health. He began to grow proud of the thought that he looked ill. Perhaps if he died, then they would know how ill at heart he had been.

Such a state of mind as this could not last. At the root of all things, in the inner being of his constitution, you could have found no healthier boy than Dicky. But sorrow had come to him as a master at that critical age when a boy is in the internal whirlpool of life. Some external influence was needed to save him from himself and, seemingly, there was none.

It came at last to the breaking point. His work had been done badly at the mill that day. With every sense of justice in his mind, Mr. Furlong had

made reference to his failure at school. Dicky listened and listened till the last word was said.

"Is that all?" he asked.

Mr. Furlong had detected a note of rebellion in his voice.

"That is all," said he, "and I wish no impertinence from you."

Dicky turned away in silence. There was no doubt in his mind that no man can be a mother. "That's all," he kept saying to himself. "That's all." But he could not have said exactly what he meant by it. Had he remembered it that night, he would have known.

He went to his room at nine o'clock. A sense of decision was working in his mind. He became conscious of it when he took the bottle of ether out of his pocket. The world was empty. He believed that in all earnestness. The world was empty. He could go to sleep and there would be no morning to wake to, no other day of toilsome monotony. He did not think of himself as dead, but as free. There were no romantic thoughts in his mind of meeting his mother in Heaven. He scarcely thought of her. He would be free, free of this terrible need of companionship.

With a steady hand he uncorked the bottle and poured the contents upon his pillow. The sweet pungency of it rose to his nostrils and reached his mind in a sense of relief. With the same clearness of brain, he got into bed, extinguished his candle, and lay down.

The fumes soothed him. He felt the numbness of sleep creeping slowly up his body to his brain. He believed that he said aloud, "It'll soon get to my head, and then——" but he said nothing. He just lay in silence in the darkness and waited.

It was then, when the torpor of the anæsthetic had almost overcome him, that there stole through the house and to his room the sound of the piano. At first he thought it was a dream. It reached his stifled senses and yet seemed far away. He asked himself if he were dreaming it. But some door must have been opened in the house below, for the sounds came clearer and more distinct. It was Anne—Anne playing the piano with that gentleness of touch which she had learnt from Christina in the months when he had been away at school.

Then the world was not empty! There was Anne!

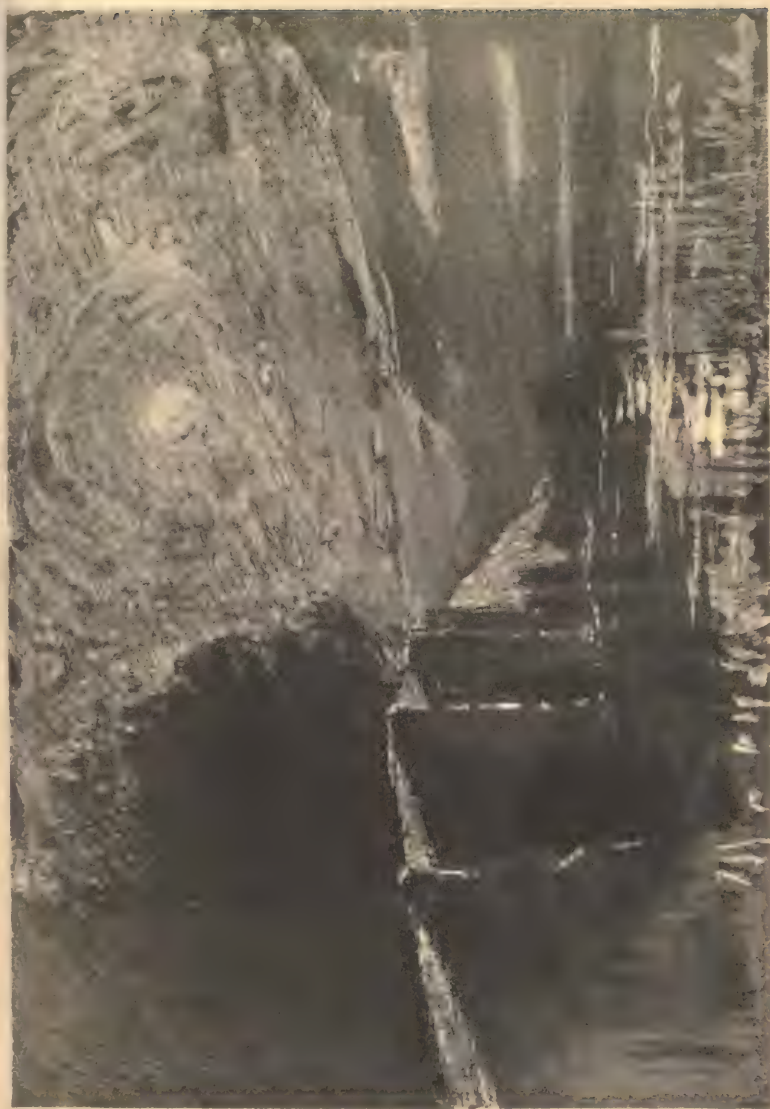
With the last energy he possessed, he pushed the pillow to the floor and fell back upon his bed asleep.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

It is as if with those who are in her charge that Destiny leads them blindfold to the very centre of the maze of life. Never do they guess in whose footsteps they are following; they scarcely know the end of that journey they pursue. All unconsciously they obey the voice—a voice, indeed, crying within their wilderness—until one day the journey ends, the bandage is loosened and drops from their eyes—the journey ends in the journey's beginning.

Then they are in the midst of the maze of life. Never completely does Destiny leave them; but here she steps aside. This is the moment when the boy becomes the leader of his own soul, the captain of his own salvation. All around him in that circle where he stands are the countless pathways leading through the thorns of failure to the flowers of success, through the soft avenues of pleasure to the dark forests of despair. No longer Destiny leads him by the hand. Here he must choose for himself. In that blindfold journey to the heart of the maze, the sinews of his character have been made; now he must use them for himself in the journey homeward. Of himself he must choose the



path he will take, and Destiny is that marble statue with impassive face which, in the centre of the maze, stands high above the hedges, watching the wanderers as they struggle towards their goal.

When his mother died, Dicky had indeed reached the centre of the maze. The bandage had been dropped from his eyes. Before him, around him, on every side, he had seen the countless pathways and, in the first moment of bewildered loneliness, not knowing which way to choose, needing the hand of Destiny which, with Christina's death, had loosed its grasp, he had courted failure at the very outset.

At such an age as his most boys are still pursuing their blindfold journey. The majority are men before they realise they are alone. The stress of circumstance had been great upon Dicky then. But no stress is more than a man can bear, and the greater it is the more is expected of him.

It was when Dicky cast the saturated pillow from his bed that he made his first choice; took of his own accord that first pathway between the high hedges, and set out upon his journey from the centre of the maze.

From that moment onward, Dicky became the leader of his own soul. His first act in that leadership was to choose the companionship of Anne.

The man who would do anything in this world must first deposit his heart in the bank of some woman's keeping. In time doubtless he will transfer it, but in that time the interest she has bestowed upon it will

have made it worth the more. The heart of a man cannot be too big so long as his brain keeps pace with it.

Dicky gave all his heart to Anne. When once the desolation of that winter had passed; when once the fairy fingers of the spring had dropped her jewelled buds upon the may trees and the meadows, then a great light of courage set its flame in Dicky's heart. He did his work in the mill, but now, instead of bowing his head beneath its monotony, contrived for every moment he could be free.

Whenever he could effect his escape, they would set out to the hills together, trembling as they left the house lest they should be called back.

Through all this time, so certain was Mr. Furlong that Dicky was destined for the mill, that in these lapses from duty he saw nothing but a gross capacity for idleness. Set with the best intention in the world, moreover with a genuine love for Dicky, the poor man was confronted with a problem he could not understand.

On one occasion when Dicky should have been at work, he discovered that his time had been spent in sketching.

"When are you going to drop this nonsense?" he asked in righteous anger. "Bring your sketch here and show it to me."

With a mind embittered by that word—nonsense—Dicky obediently brought his book. Mr. Furlong looked at the sketch he had done; looked at it first this way and then that.

"And you think it advisable," said he, "to waste valuable time upon such rubbish as this?"

"It's not rubbish," said Dicky.

"What is it then?" demanded Mr. Furlong. "It's like nothing I've ever seen in Nature. What do you call this grey part here?"

"That's a meadow."

"But meadows are green."

"Not when the mist's on them."

"But there's no definition in it," continued Mr. Furlong.

"It's the best thing I've done," said Dicky quietly.

"Well—I'm sorry for you if you can't get more definition than that. There's no shape in the thing at all."

"I didn't want to get shape," Dicky replied. "I wanted to get mist. Mist makes everything shapeless."

"Then you've missed it," said his father, and smiled at his little jest. It was no doubt a gentle attempt of his to avoid the argument in which he felt he was the loser. Had Dicky smiled with him perhaps all might have been well. But though he wanted to smile, Dicky kept it back. The matter was too serious for him. To have treated it lightly then would have been false to all his ambition. With a stolid expression he looked back in his father's eyes saying nothing.

The subconscious knowledge that his little attempt had failed, the conscious realisation that Dicky had chosen to make himself superior to his humour, irritated Mr. Furlong beyond control. With quivering fingers he tore up the book in front of Dicky's face.

"If I find you pursuing this ridiculous nonsense any longer," he said, and his voice quivered; "wasting your valuable time at the mill, and behaving generally like a young fool, I shall find some drastic means to put a stop to it."

In silence Dicky began to pick up the pieces from the floor.

"Leave those there, sir!" thundered Mr. Furlong.

"You often tell us not to be untidy," said Dicky.

"Leave those there!" repeated Mr. Furlong. "The untidiness I make, I am quite capable of seeing to myself."

That was the early morning of a Good Friday. By half past ten, Mr. Furlong had put on his black coat, his gloves and hat, and come down into the square hall with his prayer-book under his arm. Anne was there waiting. Now that her hair was put up there often seemed to be a look of Christina in her face. Mr. Furlong noticed it that morning. He put his hands on her shoulders and looked into her eyes.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Nothing," said he. "Where's Dicky?"

Anne knew well enough but hesitated to say. She had heard what had happened that morning, and all her sympathies were on Dicky's side. As Mr. Furlong went to the foot of the stairs and called, her heart beat a little quicker on Dicky's account. She knew well his frame of mind just then and trembled for what might happen.

"Dicky!" called Mr. Furlong for the second time and in a louder voice.

After a moment Dicky appeared at the top of the stairs with an old, dilapidated hat in his hand.

"You can't go to church in that hat," said his father.

"I was not going to church," said he.

"Not going to church?"

"No, father."

"Why not?"

"I didn't feel I wanted to."

"But, my dear boy, this is Christ's day."

The face of Bertha Geddes sped across Dicky's mind.

"I'm sorry," he replied. "I know it's Good Friday, but I don't know how you can expect me to feel like going to church after what happened this morning. I'm boiling inside still."

For a moment surprise confused Mr. Furlong's mind. Can there ever be a moment, he asked himself, when a father loses command over his child? And if such a moment must come, then surely with his children it had not come so soon as this? In that moment of confusion, he felt alone in the house. These two were against him. He could feel it in the expectant silence of Anne; he could see it in the glitter of Dicky's eye. This was a moment, he told himself, when the heaviness of his hand must be felt. Not the whole life force of the new generation would have made him give in then. Reason and logic he cast from him—for it is ever at a

moment like this that a man chooses the wrong weapons—and, going to the foot of the stairs, he clutched the bannisters.

“Get your hat at once,” he said. Even through the stillness of his voice, Dicky could see there was no control.

“What for?” asked Dicky.

“You’re to come to church,” said Mr. Furlong.

“I don’t see any good in going to church when I hate it.”

“Then you’ll go to church because you must obey me,” thundered his father.

“Of course,” said Dicky, “that’s a different matter,” and he went to get his hat.

All through the reading of the lessons that day—a duty both morning and evening which Mr. Furlong had fulfilled without a break every Sunday for six years—the poor man questioned himself, wondering in his calmer moments whether he had really retained the full power of his authority. In those moments Dicky was drawing faces on little scraps of paper and passing them down the pew to Anne.

That night at prayers, Mr. Furlong chose to read a portion of Scripture which dealt with filial duty. His voice had tears in it as he read.

When she had gone to bed, Anne heard a noise outside her room and saw a slip of paper thrust under her door. She picked it up. It was a caricature of Mr. Furlong whipping Dicky with the Bible.

CHAPTER II

NEARING the summit of Bredon Hill there stood in those days an oak tree with wide spreading boughs, with gnarled and knotted trunk that had faced the winds of a hundred winters and more. For long years its upper branches had been caught by the north-west gales. From the valley below it looked like a Valkyrie woman's head, with loosened hair, combed out in the wind as she might ride to battle.

It was this tree which became a secret place to Dicky and Anne. By slow degrees, visiting it one day and another, they built there, in its branches, a house. None but the most curious traveller would ever have suspected their secret, and there were few but the shepherd who ever climbed the slopes of Bredon Hill.

From the topmost branches, Dicky could see wide across the distant country and, on the platform below him, itself some twenty feet above the ground, Anne would sit by the hours together where even the sun could not pierce the dense roof of foliage above her head.

From one branch to another they slung a hammock, taking it in turns to lie there with a book through the late hot afternoons of summer. Here, in fact, Dicky

first learnt the love of reading, beginning that education of himself which he had never pursued at school. One by one he brought up the books from the bookshelves at the mill, returning them again when finished. Carlyle he read devouringly. At that age he found in the "Heroes" all that he needed for great incentive. While Anne sewed and it was his turn to lie in the hammock, he would read aloud to her his favourite passages—passages he had read to himself time and time again.

Dicky learnt much in those days. From the topmost branches of the tree, he drank in Nature as the leaves around him drank the light. He watched the face of the sky until, like the face of a woman he might love, he came to know its every change of expression, to learn the passing meaning of the clouds. It was what he had done before when he lay in Christina's bed in Christina's room. But they told more than stories to him now, those clouds that raced across or lingered in the heavens. He came to know the meaning of them all—the cloud that bears for rain, the cloud that bears for wind, the cloud that a summer breeze has caught, like a sheep strayed far beyond its fold.

And then, at last, there came to Dicky the great incentive, the spirit of inspiration which first set light in him the overpowering desire to conquer all he knew.

It is in the nature of many artists to feel all and know little. They rush to expression then as a man to the pleasure of wine. To them expression is both

stimulant and drug. To acquire it they will whip themselves into feeling—a flagellation of the spirit to excite their abnormal passion for Art.

But there are a few—men whom the world has chosen to be great—who not only feel, but know. To these, expression is the natural function of their spirit, the relief which Nature gives to the body she controls. They, indeed, are fathers of the children of the mind. Their passion for Art is no unnatural one. Their highest aim is not to gratify themselves. Gratification they have indeed—for this is the compensatory balance which Nature has not denied to any man—but they suffer, too, the agony of spirit, such travail as all true women suffer in their great hour of deliverance. So long, then, as they are true to what they know, these men are the fathers of the mind, just as surely as all true women are the mothers of the race. Once let them be false, once let them seek expression for the gratification that it gives, as men seek the light woman for the pleasures she will spare, then you will see the beginning of the end—that end which is the libertinage of Art.

To acquire knowledge then and to acquire it unceasingly, is the first duty of the artist. He will always feel, for he was born to feel; but knowledge is a prey, as elusive as the doe in flight. To keep it within view, a man must pursue it till the end.

In that Dicky had pursued the knowledge of Nature from the first moment when his eyes were clear to see,

he was on the way towards that greatness which the name of Richard Furlong carries to us now. Feeling he had had, too, but as yet the great need of expression had not found its full life in him. Both in body and in mind he was still a boy upon the very verge of manhood. It needed but the touch of a woman's hand, the glance of a woman's eye, to launch his spirit on to the waters, to set him forth upon that voyage of discovery from which no man can ever return to the days of his youth.

And ever it is that when the woman is needed, the woman is there. Fate, Destiny—call it what you will—has charge of the spirit that needs a mate. Whenever a boy is at the gates of manhood, Providence finds some woman to lead him through. It is women who make the souls of men, as it is women who give them birth.

One afternoon, late in summer, when he was free from his duties at the mill, Dicky set out for the oak tree where Anne had gone but an hour before him. The roads were dusty, the hedges white. He kept to the fields, walking in the shadows as they fell from the hedgerows.

In his pocket lay a copy of Darwin which, in direct disobedience to his father's commands, he had purchased in Pershore, and was reading day by day in his seat in the oak tree. That preface to the "Origin of Species" had brought a lump to his throat as he read. The modest simplicity of so great a man, offering so great a

work to the world, in words so unvarnished and so plain, had brought close to him the sense of his own littleness. He felt it to be a just reproof, raising the tears almost to his eyes.

He had been reading it aloud to Anne. Anne sewed and thought she listened; but she heard no more than if the wind had been stirring through the oak leaves. Darwin meant nothing to Anne. Darwin means nothing to any woman; for within her very essence lie revealed all the secrets that he found, lie hidden all the secrets that no man will ever know.

Again and again as he walked, Dicky's hand would wander to his pocket to see that the book was safely there. The country all around him had too close a hold upon his thoughts to let him remember for long that it was secure. His eyes were ever watching for effects of light, his mind ever comparing near with distant tones. In those days his eagerness to see, his insensate desire to know, mastered him in everything he did.

It was as he climbed up the hillside, nearing the oak tree, that he heard voices and stood still. Some one was talking to Anne. He could hear her voice in answer. Then some one had discovered their secret—the sacred privacy of that place was gone. He would never be able to bring up his books again and read in the hammock without fear of discovery or interruption. Here was another joy of life broken by a single blow.

“Damn!” said Dicky within himself, then added an

apology, but to whom he did not know. It was the first time in his life he had sworn.

After a moment he crept quietly up to a point where he could see the platform in the branches without being seen himself. Anne, as usual, was seated there, as usual sewing, but in the hammock, swinging backwards and forwards in easy enjoyment, was Dorothy Leggatt.

After a moment's hesitation he gave the call to Anne—that whistling of the first bar of the refrain of the British Grenadiers, the very tune with which Dicky enters into this biography. At the end of it he called her name. Even in the sound of his voice, Anne knew her guilt.

“He’s awfully angry,” she whispered to Dorothy as she swiftly put aside her sewing and commenced to climb to the ground. Dorothy checked the swinging of the hammock, waiting with stilled breath for the verdict upon her presence in the oak tree. She could hear their voices in subdued altercation, but could follow no word that was said.

As soon as Anne had reached the ground, Dicky beckoned to her.

“I don’t want her to hear,” he said when she had reached his side. “Why on earth did you let her come up? It’s all spoilt now. She knows. She’ll tell every one.”

“She’s promised on her dying solemn oath she won’t,” said Anne. “I made her say it.”

"Yes—but why did you let her come?"

"I didn't let her—I couldn't help it. I was up there when she came along and I sat as quietly as ever I possibly could. But she came right underneath the tree, and then she saw. I told her you wouldn't like it."

"She didn't seem to care much," said Dicky, "swinging about in the hammock. Well—of course it's spoilt it all now. Can't you tell her to go?"

As though she had anticipated the issue of their conversation, Dorothy had descended, and now appeared at the foot of the tree.

"It's all right—I'm going, Anne," said she, and with one short, reproachful glance into Dicky's eyes, she had started off down the hillside.

Dicky looked after her, surprise mingling with indecision in his face.

"When did she put her hair up?" he asked presently.

"'Bout a week ago," said Anne. "It makes her look awfully pretty."

"It makes her much older," said Dicky; "she looks quite grown up," and he climbed up slowly into the oak tree.

CHAPTER III

DOROTHY walked back to Eckington a different girl than when she had set out. In that quick instant she had seen the new regard of her in Dicky's eyes, had seen it perhaps the more readily since she had anticipated its coming.

There are a thousand signs by which a girl knows she is approaching womanhood; not one of these, facetious though it may sound, brings such complete realisation as when she lengthens her frock and first puts up her hair. These are the outward and visible signs which herald her entry into the arena where is fought out the everlasting antagonism between men and women.

The nearer you approach barbarism the more formal and ceremonious is this moment made. A dance is given, a party is held. She is shown to the world as a woman. In a barbarous state of things doubtless she feels it less. But with a girl in such station of life as Dorothy, the moment is one of tremulous and exhilarating excitement.

The concern she had grown at its inception had been ostensibly on account of her appearance. Mrs. Leggatt had done her hair for her, first this way and then that. Considerably more than an hour was spent before both

were satisfied. But beneath this outward concern there was the deeper knowledge that now from that moment she was a different being.

When her mother had left her, bidding her good-night, she sat long before the mirror regarding her reflection. From a child she had thought of Dicky, as a playmate who would not play with her. Now, seeing herself a woman, she thought of Dicky as a man. Would he still pass her by; still look at her with unconcern? The reflection in the mirror could not answer. It looked at her with a faint lifting of the eyebrows, a faint shadow of doubt within the eyes.

Yet this, it seemed, were a more serious matter than the other had been. A new pride she had not dreamed of was involved within her now. She thought of his disregarding her as of old and a hot flush burnt in the cheeks of that face she saw reflected in the glass.

Wasn't she pretty? She did not know. In every attitude, at every angle, she looked at her face. It was impossible to think she was ugly. Far away beyond conceit she believed that she looked well; that men would consider her with favour. But would Dicky look at her?

She had stood the looking-glass upon her bed, advancing and retreating before it that she might see every effect. Would Dicky look at her? With sudden fingers she undid the blouse about her neck, dragged it from the shoulders, arranging it about her breast as once she had seen her mother dressed on

a night when Mr. Allen, the organist, had given a concert in Pershore.

Now would Dicky look at her? As she gazed at herself she felt her heart beat quicker. She saw her lips parted as the breath came hastily between them. In a sudden sense of shame she pushed the mirror back upon the bed and, with trembling fingers, began pulling out the hairpins till her warm brown hair was hanging down once more. For the moment she was a girl again.

The next day she had dressed it again upon her head, but in a calmer frame of mind; yet in the days that followed, the thought of Dicky returned continuously. At last she had determined to walk past the mill in the hope that they might meet. The mill was working, but Dicky was nowhere to be seen. Continuing her way then to Bredon Hill, she had discovered Anne in the oak tree. Finally Dicky had come, and Dicky had looked at her.

Now she was returning to Eckington, a different girl than when she had set out. It hurt her, indeed, that he had been annoyed at finding her there, that he had not wished her to stay. But she had come down from the oak tree of her own accord. By reason of this new pride which she had found, she had determined that no persuasion would ever induce her to stay, and all this decision of action had arisen out of the knowledge that she was a different being. With that dramatic sense which is the gift of every woman, she chose to descend

from the oak tree then ; to go while they were still talking of her. Dicky had never seen her with her hair done up ; wherefore, when she reached the ground, she had anticipated that look in his eyes. The whole way home the remembrance of it thrilled her. Often as she walked along, a smile half parted her lips. When any one passed her on the road, instinctively her hand rose to her hair to thrust in a hairpin, to push aside a fine lock of hair which, loosened, had fallen across her eyes.

"Mother," she said to Mrs. Leggatt the next morning as she helped her with the household duties of the day. "Mother, when does a man first fall in love?"

Mrs. Leggatt stopped in the work she was doing. Had she been Christina and the question had been asked by Anne, she would have continued her work without a pause.

"Why do you ask that, Dorothy?" she enquired.

"I—I was reading in one of the books father has on the bookshelves——"

"One of those yellow-backed books?"

"Yes."

"What were you reading?"

"About—about a boy of just seventeen falling in love."

Mrs. Leggatt took her daughter's face in her hands and looked sadly into her eyes.

"Are you beginning to think of these things already?" she asked.

"Why—already? I've got my hair up."

"That doesn't make a woman of you, my dear," replied Mrs. Leggatt, and she tried to convince her heart that that was true. "You oughtn't to read those books yet. They weren't written for little girls."

"But I'm not a little girl."

Mrs. Leggatt smiled and took away her hands.

"You say that as if I had said something that wasn't kind. Please God there'll never come a time when you'll long to be able to say it of yourself, not at least until the years compel you to. Why don't you like to be a little girl?"

"I've been a little girl," said Dorothy petulantly; "it's different now. I suppose you don't want to tell me."

"Tell you what?"

"What I asked you—when a man first falls in love."

"What does the yellow-backed book say?"

"Well, I told you. It's about a boy of seventeen. Can a boy of seventeen fall in love?"

"If the book says so I expect it's right."

Dorothy turned away.

"That's not an answer," said she.

"Well, my dear child—how can I answer? A boy of seventeen may just as likely fall in love as a man of fifty. You can never know when it will come to any one—man or woman."

"When did you fall in love?" asked Dorothy.

The poor woman turned away and went on with her work. The tears had gathered quickly in her eyes. It was now more bitterly than ever that she felt the punishment of her folly. She could not look her own child in the face to give her that advice and counsel which every child must need. The very thought that Dorothy knew so little of the past—she would not have asked such questions had it been present in her mind—filled her with a sense of dread for that moment when she must come to know and understand it all.

But something in the line of her shoulders as she turned away brought the consciousness of it quickly to Dorothy's mind. In a moment she was at her mother's side, her arms about her neck. She guessed, but did not know even then. Only the faintest rumours of that scandal had ever reached her ears. Being a child, and in the very house where it had happened, no one had ever spoken of it to her, as at the time, they had spoken freely of it in Eckington. Mr. Allen had been sent away. For many days her mother had been in tears, and for many weeks had never ventured out of the house until it was dark. A sense of shame and disgrace had fallen upon the family, repelling all childish curiosity. She had asked no questions at the time and, since then, life had gone on in its accustomed ways. She had almost forgotten it.

But now, upon an impulse, she knew that what she had always guessed was true. Her mother had loved Mr. Allen. With that knowledge came rushing the

thousand possibilities vaguely, nebulously, to her mind.

"Dearest," she whispered. "I'm so sorry—I didn't mean it like that."

The little courage which the wretched woman still possessed was lifted by her daughter's pity.

"Like what?" said she. "Like what?"

"You loved Mr. Allen, didn't you?"

"Did your father tell you that?"

"No."

"Then how did you know?"

"I guessed."

For one moment Mrs. Leggatt looked at Dorothy; one moment in which she yet had hope to keep the secret from her still. The moment passed and then her eyes fell. It was too late. Dorothy was quite right. She was different now. No longer was she a little girl! Something had taught her; some sleeping instinct had awakened. She knew now the meaning that love can bring into a woman's life. There was nothing she could hide from her now. Often and often she had meant to give her a false impression concerning Mr. Allen's sudden departure, but she had left it over long. It was too late now. In a few more months, in a few more days, perhaps, she would come to understand it all. As her eyes fell, she shuddered.

"Mother," said Dorothy presently, when the silence had expressed the countless words which passed through both their minds. "Mother—do you think

that's why the Furlongs don't like me to be with them?"

Mrs. Leggatt looked quickly up. A bright light of anger was in her eyes. All a mother's instinct for protection stirred fiercely in her then.

"What have they done?" she asked.

Dorothy told her of what had happened in the oak tree.

"It wasn't Anne at all," she added; "it was Dicky."

Mrs. Leggatt smiled again.

"If it wasn't Anne," said she, "it doesn't matter. It's women who make the laws for women; women who judge their own kind. If it was only Dicky, that's not the reason. Men don't censure women who have loved. It's only women who hate them. They hate them in self-defence. If it was only Dicky, you needn't mind. P'raps he's in love with you and doesn't know it."

It was when she said that, and when she saw the look in Dorothy's eyes, that she would have given years from her life to have those words back again.

CHAPTER IV

FOR the whole of the next week, Dicky waited in expectant apprehension of Wilfrid appearing at the oak tree. The days of their friendship were long over. No two boys who once were friends could have grown more dissimilar in their pursuits. During the eighteen months in which Dicky had been away at school in the north, all ties had been severed between them. The growth of Wilfrid's mind had been too slow. When he came back for his last holidays Dicky found that they had nothing in common. Wilfrid had found another companion at his father's school, and there the whole friendship had ended; not in enmity—not in dislike. It had died because there was no food left upon which it could eke out the merest existence.

And now, with growing apprehension, Dicky waited in full confidence, believing that as soon as he had heard of it, Wilfrid would be drawn by the glory of secrecy, and come at once to the oak tree. But Wilfrid never came.

At last Dicky grew to believe that Dorothy had kept her dying solemn oath. She had not told any one. Against all his pre-conceived ideas he found she was capable of regarding a secret.

He thought about this often at night, and with

astonishment. For not only had she kept the secret, she also herself had never appeared at the oak tree again. Seeing that now she knew, that seemed rather foolish to Dicky. After a week, he questioned Anne about it.

"I don't see how you could have expected her to have done anything else," said Anne. "You showed her plainly enough that you didn't want her to be there. She's fearfully sensitive. She's always thinking that people don't want to speak to her—because—oh—well, you know why."

"Why?" asked Dicky.

"Her mother, of course."

"Oh!" That had never entered Dicky's head. But now he was taking his first lessons in that strange art of little things which guide the whole course of women's lives. He had not realised till then that Dorothy's life might still be in the shadow of her mother's folly. Whenever he had seen her himself, the thought had never entered his head. Now suddenly he became doubly conscious of it; conscious most of all that this Dorothy, whom he had despised, had a sorrow of her very own to bear, moreover bore it bravely too.

As the thought materialised in his mind, he turned quickly to Anne.

"Ask her to come up to the tree again," said he.

Anne flung her arms round his neck.

"Oh, Dicky!" she exclaimed, "may I really? She will be so glad. And you can read just the same. It won't matter her being there."

Dicky turned away.

“Oh, I don’t mean when I am there,” said he. “She wouldn’t understand Darwin. She’d hate it. No—you can ask her when I’m not there. I shan’t be able to come till at least six to-morrow. There’s a huge load coming in in the morning. Take her along with you to-morrow afternoon.”

At three o’clock the next day, Dicky heard the click of the catch on the wicket gate. Without inquiring of the reason in his mind, he climbed the ladder into the mill loft, where the grey dust lay deep like snow upon the rafters; there he watched Anne from a window in the gable as she walked along the road towards the hill.

“Lord!” he said aloud, “I wish I was a girl,” and of all girls would have been the most miserable in the world had his wish been gratified.

He followed her with his eyes till she was out of sight, wondering, as he climbed down the ladder, what girls found to talk about when they were alone. For the next hour he could think of nothing else but those two, sitting there by themselves in the oak tree, while he had to pursue his monotonous labours in the mill. Loathing his work as he did, the seeming injustice of it was almost unbearable. He kept looking out of the window, with eyes bent longingly in the direction of Bredon Hill.

Of course Dorothy would be gone before he could get there. But would it ever even reach the hour of six, when he could start. From the moment the clock had struck four he would look at it every five minutes. It occurred to him then that he had never known how grotesquely long was the period of a man’s life. If

minutes went as slowly as that, it was well-nigh impossible to have any conception of the three-score years and ten.

At half-past four, Mr. Furlong ordered the trap to be got ready, informing Dicky that he was driving into Pershore. He left instructions for as much work to be done as Dicky could well accomplish by six o'clock.

"If you put your shoulder to the wheel," said he, "you'll be able to get away by six. I believe in working under pressure, it doesn't do anybody any harm."

"I shan't be later anyhow than half-past six," said Dicky.

Mr. Furlong's mind was easy as he rode away. If he works till half-past six, he thought, I can't grumble. But Dicky had not the faintest intention of working for another moment. No sooner had the rumble of the trap's wheels died away along the road than he was using the utmost of his persuasions to induce one of the men in the mill to do the work for him. By bribery and that corruption of the way Dicky had with him when his needs were great, he gained his point. Will'um agreed to do his work as well as his own. The sixpence a week which Dicky was now getting in pocket money was pledged for a fortnight in order to gain his ends.

He could not have said why on this afternoon in particular he was so anxious to be free. The sky was cloudless, the sun a fierce flame in the heavens. There were none of those tones of light across the meadows or in the shadow of the hills to stir his interest in the countryside. The sun was bleaching the colour out of

the world. Even the distant forests which could be as blue as the seas of the Orient, were paled to a misty grey. The heat was intense. Only the incessant hum of insects, the bees in the meadows, the dragon-flies across the reeds, gave evidence that the world was yet alive. Not a leaf stirred on the willow trees. It was the insects alone that dared to move on so hot a day.

As soon as he had made sure that his duties would be done, Dicky effected his escape. He closed the wicket gate in silence and started running down the road. By the road was the shortest way. True, it was dusty and hotter there than through the meadows. A flock of sheep in the distance, with the old shepherd at their heels, raised a white cloud of dust that hung about them as they walked. But Dicky chose the road.

"Afternoon, Master Dicky," said the shepherd, "'e be in a fair hurry for a hot day."

Dicky wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Mr. Angel," he said, coming up close to the shepherd's side, "don't ever say you saw me out here this afternoon."

"I woan't, indeed," said the shepherd slowly; "but look you, supposin' I'm asked—what be I to do then?"

"I suppose you wouldn't tell a lie?" suggested Dicky.

"No—indeed no," said the shepherd. "How could I do that if I were asked fair an' square? How could I say I didn't see you when I did?"

"You mightn't have seen me," said Dicky, "if I'd gone by the meadows; but I should have been out all the same. You can't work in a mill on a day like this.

I can't. Well—that's what you can do—imagine I went by the meadows—you needn't really have seen me at all. I don't suppose you'll be asked anyhow."

Feeling then that he had wasted enough time over a purely hypothetical possibility, Dicky went on with lengthy strides. The shepherd followed behind with his sheep, watching his swiftly diminishing figure.

"That's right enough," said he to himself, "if he'd gone by the meadows; but if Mr. Furlong asks me did I see 'em on the road, what be I to do then but say I did? Mrs. Angel might know summat else I could say. I'm d—ommed if I do."

In less than twenty minutes, Dicky had reached the foot of the hill, had stopped, breathless, to whistle the call. Before he had finished it, there came the answering whistle from the oak tree and, as he mounted the steep hill path, he listened keenly for the sound of voices. Everything was silent. A heron soared over the hill through the burnished blue of the sky, sinking down to the trees that clustered by the river. Dicky watched that great comprehensive sweeping of the wings. In the vast silence about him, it almost seemed that he could hear the whirr of the beating pinions as the great bird passed overhead.

As soon as he had partially gained his breath, he set to the same pace again up the hill. Presently he saw the figure of Anne descending to meet him. Then she was alone. Imperceptibly his pace slackened in a scarcely conscious sense of disappointment.

"What is it?" he asked before she had reached his side.

"I thought you weren't coming till after six," said Anne. "Dorothy's still there."

"Oh—well, it doesn't matter," said Dicky. "If she doesn't like my reading, she'll have to put up with it. I got Will'um to do my work. Father's gone in to Pershore."

"I don't expect she'll mind," said Anne.

It was full of embarrassment, that meeting of theirs in the oak tree. Dicky felt the warmth in his cheeks, and said it was the hottest day they had had that year. Dorothy leant uncomfortably against one of the branches with a none too certain foothold. She felt as though everything were slipping from beneath her feet. Even the consciousness of being so high above the ground made her feel suddenly ill-at-ease.

"Where are you going to sit?" asked Dicky, "because I'm going to read. I suppose you'd better lie in the hammock, hadn't you?"

"No—I can sit here easily," she replied. "I can sit on the platform, Dicky. You always have the hammock, don't you?"

"Did Anne say that?" he asked.

"I said you liked it," said Anne; "but we take it in turns. It's your turn to-day. That's what I told Dorothy."

Dicky spread out the hammock, then looked at Dorothy.

"In you get," said he. And she obeyed.

For half an hour then, Dicky's voice made a dim monotonous note in the silence of the day. He found

the "Origin of Species" more difficult to understand than he had done at other times. The passages seemed more complex. He was scarcely aware that there were moments when his eyes wandered from the printed page to the profile of Dorothy's face as she lay in the hammock. He did not realise that it is difficult to follow the intricate law of Evolution, considering at the same time the suddenly discovered beauties of a woman's face. Anne had been quite right. Dorothy was a prettier girl since she had put up her hair. He could not follow what difference it had made. He did not even know where her prettiness lay. It had not been in the nature of his instinct in Art to consider the beauties of line in a woman face. He did not perceive in the warm fulness of her lips that promise of caresses—a promise which has beauty in itself. It did not appeal to him that the whole line of her face, from her forehead to her throat, had a grace of proportion, that the grey eyes were set honestly and wide apart. It was more he liked the character he saw; yet character there was little. A certain degree of patience, a great look of fidelity in the eyes, a need for great love that lay in the half-drooping corners of her mouth.

But of real character this was all. She had few of the subtleties of her sex, none of its brilliant flashes of a superior intelligence. Yet the character he found there made Dicky say to himself that Anne was right. Dorothy was prettier since she had put up her hair. Thinking all these things, he went on reading aloud,

wondering why the "Origin of Species" was so difficult to understand.

"Getting tired of it?" he asked presently, looking up from the pages.

Both of them stirred quickly and emphatically declared that they were not. He was surprised at the sound of genuine interest in their voices, not realising that he had asked because he was getting tired of it himself.

Presently Anne laid down her work.

"Wait a moment, Dicky," she said. "Dorothy, did I give you a piece of that stuff to hold when we came up?"

Dorothy shook her head.

"Well, just see if you're lying on it in the hammock."

Dicky waited. The piece of material was not to be found. Anne rolled up the sewing in her lap.

"I shall have to go back," said she. "I must get this finished to-day, and I've left a piece behind me." She rose to her feet. Dorothy began slowly to descend from the hammock.

"Are you both going?" exclaimed Dicky.

"I must," said Anne.

"I suppose I'd better," said Dorothy.

Dicky shut up the book.

"Oh, I say! What awful rot! After sweating all this way out here."

The sublime selfishness of his sex did not seem to appeal to any of them. The world is full of women who are content to listen to the "Origin of Species"; the world is full of men who expect such contentment

of them. Here they were, studying Darwin's law of Selection, with the very law taking force under their eyes, and none of them, not even Dicky himself, had understood a word of what he had been reading.

"Dorothy needn't come," said Anne. In the back of her heart, far behind her own consciousness, she had determined that Dorothy should stay.

"Well, I don't suppose she cares very much for the reading," said Dicky, hoping, without knowing it, that he might put it to her pride to stay.

Dorothy looked from one to the other.

"But p'raps you wouldn't care to go alone, Anne?" she asked, and put it to the pride of Anne that she might say she would.

"Of course I don't mind going alone," declared Anne, and started quickly to climb to the ground.

"Don't tell the pater where I am when he comes back," Dicky called out after her. "Will'um's going to say I left off at a quarter-past six."

Anne made her promise. She smiled when she reached the ground.

"Who'd ever have thought," she said to herself. "He used to call her a little ass. I wonder if he got away on purpose."

High up in the oak tree, as she descended the hill, Anne heard the droning note of Dicky's voice as he started reading once more. With every step it grew fainter until, at last, she heard it no more. The thought sped across her mind that he must have stopped altogether. She smiled once more.

CHAPTER V

SOLEMNLY Dicky read of the habits of crustaceans, while Dorothy lay back on her cushion in the hammock and watched his face. Whenever he looked in her direction, her eyes were swift to the dense canopy of leaves overhead. Not once did their several glances meet. Still Dicky read on, the words coming slower and slower, laboured and more laboured in their meaning, until he scarcely realised the sense of it at all.

"Sure you're not tired of it?" he asked again.

Most earnestly Dorothy assured him she was not.

"He must have been a wonderful old man—Darwin," and he closed the book with his finger marking the page.

"Wonderful," said Dorothy.

"Fancy to have thought all that out, steadily, for years and years, and then to write it all down. I'd like to do something that 'ud take me years and years."

"Something at the mill?"

"Lord, no! I hate the mill!"

"Do what then?"

"Paint a picture."

"Yes—Anne told me."

"Told you what?"

"About your wanting to be a painter."

Dicky laid down the book. There were things more interesting to him just then than the "Origin of Species."

"Anne doesn't really know," said he and then, as he looked at her, she looked back at him and he thought it seemed as if she would understand everything. "It's no good really telling Anne," he went on. "She's an awful brick, but I can see she doesn't know. It's no good really telling her."

Dorothy turned round on her cushion and, in a voice half whispering, half pleading—

"Tell me," she said.

"You'd only laugh at me," he replied. "Anne 'ud laugh too. The pater 'ud be mad."

"I wouldn't laugh, Dicky," said she.

That was the first time in his life that Dicky really knew he had heard the voice of a woman. He looked out through a window in the foliage of the oak tree. The sun was dropping slow through the heavens, the humming insects were winging homeward with their spoil. Far away on the road to Little Cumberton he could see an old man, stepping it slowly through the dust in the shadow of the hedges. A bundle was on his shoulder. His back was bent. Further away still, in a bend where the river lay open in the meadows, the red cattle and the white were knee-deep in the silver water. He thought the world was very wonderful.

"I'm going to be a painter," he said, turning suddenly. "One of these days I'm going to leave the mill. I don't care what any one says. If the pater doesn't let me go, I shall run away."

"You won't leave Eckington, Dicky?" she asked quickly.

"Leave Eckington!" he laughed, and it hurt right in her heart. "What's the good of Eckington? I shall go to London."

She looked away and was silent. Who could say how much of the future she saw then? Women have that sight of which a man knows nothing.

For that instant Dicky had been riding in the vault of heaven on the clouds of his ambition. When suddenly he realised her silence, he came to earth.

"Would you mind if I went to London?"

Still she looked away and still was silent. But in those days Dicky knew nothing of women's silence. He had yet to learn how it is in the things she leaves undone, the words she leaves unsaid, a woman says more a thousand times than ever is asked of her. She was telling him then that she loved him with every beating of her heart, with every silence of her lips. Dicky thought she did not care enough even to answer, and longed to make her say that she would mind his going, but knew no means to accomplish his desire. He saw her hand lying idly over the side of the hammock, and wondered if he touched it what she would say.

After long moments he asked her if she believed in palmistry. At the unexpected question, she turned with lifted eyebrows and with puzzled eyes.

"Anne's got a book," said he, holding out his hand. "That's the line of Fate, and these are the lines of Art. The book says I shall do something in Art. I—I wonder if you'll ever do anything."

With all ingenuousness she held out her palm for him to see. He took her hands timidly in his. However cold the blood may be, hands may be warm. It is not a bodily warmth, but the very touch of them can tingle through the veins. Both felt the sudden warmth within them as his fingers closed over her wrists. For this is the first caress of lovers and, in those early moments, means as much as any touching of the lips.

The power of speech was gone from Dicky then. He could only sit in silence holding her hand, looking at the lines upon her palms, yet seeing only the smooth skin, following only the lines of her arm to where the sleeve of her dress hid it from his eyes.

In moments, Dorothy watched his face, wondering why he had spoken of palmistry, seeing he had said nothing of it since. At the hazardous risk of losing the touch of his hand, she took her own away and shifted her position in the hammock. While she was moving Dicky did nothing; but when she had settled down again, he leant forward as casually as he could to where her hand lay out on the hammock's edge. In

the firm belief that he had concealed his own clumsiness, he took it in his own once more.

She caught a short breath in her throat. She knew now. He had never meant to talk of palmistry at all. It had been worth the risk to learn so much.

There then for long minutes they sat without speaking. At last, with ready apprehension, Dicky's fingers stroked the softness of her wrist. Neither because she wanted to, nor because she thought she ought, Dorothy was about to take her hand away. But his fingers were ready, and his fingers held her fast.

"Does it matter?" he whispered.

And she whispered it did not.

So he still caressed her hands. Lest she might become nervous of it again, from time to time he made remarks, the most casual in the world.

"Do you like it up here?" he asked.

Dorothy nodded her head.

Again, after a long pause, he inquired if she had told Wilfrid of their secret.

"No," said she.

"Why not?"

"I knew you weren't friends with him now—besides, Anne made me swear."

Dicky looked for one instant in her eyes and then made up his mind. However daring a thing it was to do, he meant to do it then. Whatever it cost, and if she would never speak to him again, his determination

was fixed. With his heart hammering in his breast and a hot wind beating on his forehead, he bent suddenly over her hand, kissing the fingers that he held.

There was one moment of a vibrating pause. Their hearts were leaping in a wild excitement. Something had happened, something had been said in silence, a thousand times more sudden and arresting than if a voice had hailed them from the hill below. He knew what it meant; she knew what it meant. It was the suddenness of it that frightened them both.

Dorothy looked at him with burning cheeks.

"We ought to be going," she said in a breath.

Having carried out his intention, Dicky was ready to obey. In silence they climbed down from the oak tree. In silence, through all that distance from the hill they walked back towards Eckington.

When at the mill they parted, Dicky spoke at last.

"Are you angry with me?" he said.

Dorothy just shook her head and smiled.

CHAPTER VI

IN a few hours Dicky had discovered a new world. He had crossed the plains, had penetrated into the deep shadows of the valleys, had mounted the high hills and now, upon the other side, there stretched before him, at his feet, a land of gold, a land of sunshine, a land of such promise as made his heart leap and the blood go racing in his veins.

He was in love ; wildly, passionately, overwhelmingly in love. The suddenness of it bewildered him, yet he wondered constantly in his thoughts why he had not found out his love for Dorothy years and years ago.

Again and again he told himself that it must have been meant from the beginning. Then why had he only learnt it now ? He, too, remembered how he had thought her a little fool. He laughed aloud in the darkness as he lay in bed that night, calling the thoughts back to his mind. A little fool ! She was the most wonderful creature in the world ! He said her name aloud—Dorothy ; then lay there listening to the echoes of it as they reverberated down into the very depths of his consciousness.

At sunrise he was awake. Sleep is no luxury to a boy in love. Indeed, he may dream, but the night is

wasted when no dreams have come. In the daytime, with all his thoughts, he makes the world be full of her. She sings in the throat of every thrush, her voice is there in the tinkling music of the running brook, she whispers in the leaves that rustle to each gentle wind. There is nothing living in the world but her.

Before the sun was well into the heavens, Dicky was making his way up the pathway on Bredon Hill. The clocks of the churches in Little Cumberton and Eckington rang out the hour of five in a distant chorus as he climbed the branches into the oak tree. This was where it had all happened. There was the hammock in which she lay. He stood looking at it with all that awe and wonder of a pilgrim at a shrine. There, indeed, the miracle had been wrought; there he had held her hand, there looked into her eyes and seen the whole meaning of life, why the earth had been made and he been born in it. There was no need now for the smallness of a fieldmouse or the nimbleness of a wren. He had discovered why God had made the world. It was that he, Dicky, might love Dorothy as no man had ever loved a woman before.

For long moments he stood by the side of the hammock, living again that hour when they had been alone; living in swift imagination the countless hours that lay before them. There was some purpose in it, he knew that. Not knowing what purpose it was, he fulfilled it in all the blindness of his desire.

In a little cupboard they had built out of an old box

on the platform, Dicky kept the paint box Christina had given him together with all the impedimenta he required. To this cupboard he went, almost unconscious of the need that urged him. The world was there below him. With the divine conceit of a boy in love, with that outrageous pride of power, he set to work to paint a picture of the world, a picture of all life, of all romance. He painted a picture of the sun.

This was the greatest failure he had made. Away beyond him in that white light of heat, the fields, the river, the whole country side was lying breathless in pale sunshine. There was no form to mould, no lines were there to draw. The river moved through fields of gold and, like a serpent gliding through the shimmering grass, vanished in silver mist that had no beginning and no end. Such shadows of the trees as fell were toned in gold, transparent as a dragon-fly's wing. No subject was there there for him to paint but the greatest subject of all—Romance—the breathing, golden, all-effulgent light whose soul and being is the very sun itself. Dicky painted a picture of the sun.

For two hours he sat there. At last he rose and put his paints away in the cupboard. For one moment he looked at the sheet of paper in his hand. It was all white, as spotless as when he had torn it from the block. He had done nothing. This was the greatest failure he had made, the greatest failure which had brought him nearest to success.

That picture took him ten years to paint, and he

began it that day in the oak tree. Now every one knows Richard Furlong's picture called—Romance. It is not so many years ago since it passed into the possession of the French Government. It is the same picture which that early morning he began with a blank white sheet of paper.

CHAPTER VII

THE days of Dicky's love-making came and went. Their passing was so swift, he could not mark their going. It was autumn again, and the oak leaves were red before he could believe the summer really gone.

They had been alone a great deal together. Dorothy would accompany him long distances into the country to sit beside him while he sketched. His energy for work then was uncontrolled. Yet during all that time he had never touched her hand again or said one word of what had passed when they were alone together in the oak tree.

For long hours at night Dorothy would lie awake with wondering mind. She loved. She was content with that. In the shallows of her heart she believed that Dicky loved her. He kept her closely with him wherever he went. But in the quiet depths of her consciousness, those depths which a woman only fathoms when her heart is beating in the stillness of the night—she was unsatisfied with the progress of their love. Something was needed to make it live with that burning reality which love meant to her. In what it lacked she could not guess. He might take her hand again ;

he might kiss it again as he had done that day in the oak tree. He might even kiss her lips. And when she thought of that her heart throbbed wildly in her breast; she laid her head in faintness on her pillow, murmuring his name beneath her breath.

But none of these things did Dicky do. He had caught the first meaning of Romance and, as a boy when he catches the first butterfly of the year, feared as yet to touch it with his hands lest he should bruise its wings.

As surely as the day must vanish into night, the night unfold its darkness and set free the day once more, so surely did Dick know that the moment would come when Dorothy would be in his arms and his lips be seeking hers. So the thousand lovers proved their love. But his was like no other love the world had ever known. In those first days when he had seen Romance, such proof of love as this would have brought it all to earth. It was in the spirit of it he lived; in the spirit of it he worked with an untiring energy while Dorothy sat beside him, waiting for the hour when she might truly know.

And so the days of summer fell behind them into autumn. One night as she passed her daughter's room, Mrs. Leggatt stopped, hearing the sound of sobbing from within. She listened, making doubly sure. Then she turned the handle and went in.

"Dorothy?" she whispered.

The sobbing ceased.

"What is it?" she asked and knelt beside the bed.

"What is it? Aren't you well?"

A broken voice assured her that she was.

"Then what's the matter?"

There was no reply. It needed the gentleness of her arms, the quiet, soothing fingers on her daughter's head, before Mrs. Leggatt could bring the story from Dorothy's lips. Mrs. Leggatt's heart misgave her as she listened. The world was very old; was very changeless in the midst of all its change. Adam and Eve might well, indeed, have been turned out of the Garden, but they had only been driven into the world. She laid her head upon Dorothy's pillow, adding a sigh to her daughter's tears when the little story was ended.

"But if you're sure he loves you," she asked presently, "isn't that enough?"

Dorothy was silent.

"Isn't it? Isn't it?" persisted Mrs. Leggatt. "What more can you want but that?"

"But he doesn't say so," whispered Dorothy. "He doesn't show it. Never—not once since that first day when—when he—held my hand and—then—kissed it. He asked me that day if I was angry. Perhaps when I only shook my head he didn't understand that I meant—no. But I know he'd wanted to take my hand. It hadn't been anything to do with looking at the lines, because I took it away to see, and he got it back again as soon as he could."

In the darkness, Mrs. Leggatt smiled; a smile in

which no thought of laughter lay concealed. You smile at memories that only bring you pain ; it is the gentle smile of recognition. That is all.

“ Well—if he wishes to be with you now,” she said, “ isn’t that proof enough ? Isn’t that all that you need ? It is so easy to get more, and when it comes it is always more than you ask. ‘ The little more and how much it seems—’ I must read Browning to you. It was read to me once. But it’s never the little more you get, for the little more is the very edge and then—oh—what more do you want ? ”

“ If he—if only he——” she could not bring herself to say the words.

“ If only he kissed you, Dorothy—is that it ? Oh, he’ll do that one day, my little girl ; why should you want it now ? He may love you to-day better than ever he will in his life again. Oh—isn’t it the world ?—it’s the world all over again ! Be content, my dear, be content with little. It is just the more a woman wants which makes the much more that she gets. Be content with little—it is enough.”

She could give no better advice than this. In her good-hearted but foolish way the poor woman could not find it in her conscience to adopt an attitude of stern reproof. Her own folly was known. How could she pose in virtuous *censure* of this very passion to which she herself had given way ? It was the world, she had said, it was the world all over again. It stirred up memories which for years she had striven to subdue.

She could only speak from them. All she said was true—only too true, with that painful truth which comes from bitter experience. But it was no advice from a mother to her child.

She may have thought her words contained a warning, saving Dorothy from the abyss into which she herself had fallen, but their effect was far from what she supposed. The great tide of Nature which turns in every woman at such an age had fully turned in Dorothy then. She loved Dicky with her whole heart and understanding. There was nothing else in Life for her but this. To that end, therefore, of its complete and perfect comprehension, she set the whole purpose of her mind. Nothing more than this was to be gained. She knew nothing of, nor cared for, the development it brought her. The moment a girl becomes a woman, her development is complete. She can become no more. The experiences of Life lie still in front of her ; they harden or soften as they come. But in the development of purpose in her soul, the journey of a woman's life finds its completion when love comes knocking at her heart, and, in answer to its summons, she steps forth into the light of womanhood.

To Dorothy, the advice her mother had given her, served only to quicken her mind to its end. If it were not the little more which she needed, but the much more she would get, what was that more and could it ever be too much ?

The next time she met Dicky alone, her mind was trembling in expectation. That premonition which

comes to women, that occult sense which gives them power to see ahead of time, bade her prepare with those delicious warnings love brings triumphantly to a woman's heart. She knew that things would happen then, felt the foreshadowing of them in her mind, but did not realise she only knew, because she meant that they should be. It is often that a woman's instinct warns her of events she means herself to bring about.

It was a night in late September when, during a party at Mrs. Leggatt's house, they both slipped away.

"Just come along to the bridge," Dicky had whispered to her. "The moon's rising at a quarter to nine—harvest moon—I want to see it down the river."

At first she had demurred. There would be trouble, she said, when it was found that they were gone.

"They wouldn't find out till the party's over," Dicky had urged. "It won't be over till nearly eleven. Do come, Dorothy. We won't be gone more than half an hour."

"But why do you want to see the moon?" she asked. "You can see it from the window here."

"Not like it will be on the bridge."

"But won't it be fearfully cold?" she objected.

"Do you mind if it is?" he murmured. "We can stand close together. It won't be so cold then."

That had not really been his purpose in going. It thrilled him to think they might stand close together, but he had wanted to see that harvest moon, had waited nearly the whole month for it.

He did not know it, but it was she who had made him

say how they would defeat the cold, this simple, gentle Dorothy, who, with a quiet obedience, did all that Nature commanded her.

"Do come," Dicky whispered.

She said no other word against it. Together they crept out of the house, making their way down the road, past the old butter cross to the tortuous bridge of Eckington, which for so many hundreds of years has been the only path across the Avon between Pershore and the West.

Countless lovers before them have stood in the little niches of that bridge; countless lovers have leant over that grey stone parapet, worn with the weight of years and discoloured by many a winter. They were not the first to stand there, looking down into the running water, not the first to find some likeness in its passing ripples to the steady ebbing of their lives.

But no such thoughts as these occupied the minds of Dicky and Dorothy then. Through the brush stems of the willows as they reached the bridge, the harvest moon, deep orange, like a burning lamp, was swinging up against the dark velvet of the sky. Dicky forgot all coldness of the night. Nature was using her colours in such subtlety of tone as he knew he could never hope to master. Yet he saw it all with no sense of envy or regret. The ambition to conquer then was not so great as the knowledge of Romance. At that moment, as the beauty of the world surrounded him, he knew that he was master of it all. There was nothing in life which Dorothy might ask him then to do which he

could not have accomplished. He felt in himself the strength and virtue of a hundred men. Life was almost too wonderful, yet great and wonderful as it was, he could have sacrificed it all to the mere murmur of her wish.

"I wouldn't mind if it never came to to-morrow morning," he said at last. "Look where just that one ripple catches the reflection of the moon."

With heart beating, Dorothy pressed closer to his side.

"Don't you feel cold?" she asked. "You've got nothing on your head."

"Do you?" he replied. At her request he could have put an end to life then and there; but it would have gone hard with him had she suggested they should turn back because she felt cold.

"Do you feel cold?" he repeated. "It's really quite warm, isn't it?"

"Oh, I'm all right," said she. "I've got on a warm coat. This fur cap's warm, too. I wish I'd brought my gloves."

"Hands cold?" he asked.

"They are a little," she replied, and there was expectation in her heart.

Half then in joy and still in wonder, his hands groped down in the darkness until they found the touch of hers.

"I don't expect they feel cold outside," said she quickly; "but they do in."

He took them closely in his own, crushing the fingers

in his grasp. She felt the pain of it, and loved the pain. No cry of complaint came near her lips and, as Dicky held them, still gazing at the glory of the rising moon, her eyes were closed. All joy and all delight she felt within herself. So far with Dicky the enchantment was in life.

For some long time they stood there, his hands caressing hers. One by one the words were mounting to his mind, just as the moon, turning from orange to gold, was mounting above the willows into the vault of stars. Too well he knew he loved her, but never had the words come home to him till then. Now they were burning in his brain—long passionate sentences in whose embrace the whole meaning of love was compassed. One by one they rolled across his mind. He thought he had grasped them, had found the great moment for expression and, before he knew it, had whispered her name.

“Dorothy!”

She leant still nearer to him. Her heart was beating in the prison of her breast.

“What, Dicky?” she whispered.

“I love you,” said he. “Oh—I love you—that’s all—that’s all.”

His great sentences had gone from him. The moment before they had all been there; but in the moment itself there were only three words which he could say.

“Do you love me?” he asked presently.

“Frightfully,” she whispered.

He held her hands yet tighter and still looked at the moon.

"I love you better than anything else in the world," he went on, and believed it was the first time in the world such words had ever been said.

"Better than your painting?" she whispered and, knowing that he must, he was quite willing to say—yes.

One hand she disengaged to draw it gently round his neck. They looked in each other's eyes then; their breath was on each other's cheeks. How long in silence that lasted neither of them could ever have told. The night was like a furnace about them as they stood there then.

"Why don't you kiss me, Dicky?" she whispered at last, as a woman fainting asks for water.

For one second the world stood still to let the mad race of thoughts crash on through Dicky's mind. Something was ending here. The virtue and the strength of all those hundred men were going from his heart. Like the tramp of a company leaving the gates of a city, he felt them passing from his soul. One by one—one by one their footsteps fell away. Nearer and nearer her eyes drew his into the complete oblivion of their depths. One moment he was free, the next a slave. His lips leant down to hers. In the warmth of them he forgot all those moments of Romance. Dicky would not have sacrificed Life then for all the Romance in the world.

CHAPTER VIII

DURING all that period since he had left school, Dicky had kept in touch with Mr. Hollom. Had the matter been left in Dicky's own hands, doubtless the friendship might have dropped; but, true to his word to Christina, Mr. Hollom never allowed his interest in Dicky to abate. Every week he wrote and every week, in letters not exactly to be commended for their length, Dicky replied, giving information mainly about his painting, or his troubles at the mill, but never confessing his love for Dorothy or letting it be understood what changes in life that love had brought to him.

In the mental composition of Dicky there was a degree of reticence, contrasting oddly with that impulsiveness of mind which he showed in most of his dealings. This reticence no doubt he inherited from his father. On all subjects concerning himself, Mr. Furlong was slow to speak. Indeed, with him, it amounted to secretiveness. He was secretive about his age, about the income he made from the profits of the mill. Because of this secretiveness he had never gained the confidence of his children, had never even gained the confidence of his wife.

The fringe of this mantle then, perhaps, had fallen

upon Dicky. He did not even speak to Anne about his love for Dorothy, though in his heart he knew well enough that she was a conscious spectator of it all. Yet still he clung to the deeper secret of it, dimly realising that the unspoken word may be more truly a talisman than that which is spoken. So of his love for Dorothy, Mr. Hollom knew nothing. One morning, at breakfast, early in the next year, Mr. Furlong remarked upon the letter that lay on Dicky's plate.

"Who's writing to you, Dicky?" he asked, and he smiled as though he would suggest his suspicions that the letter was addressed to Dicky's heart.

Dicky avoided the smile.

"It's from Mr. Hollom," he replied.

"Oh—from him? He's a nice fellow. I've often thought of asking him to come and stay here again. He's never been here since——since you left school. You'd like to see him again, I suppose?"

"Rather," said Dicky eagerly.

"Well—I'll write and ask him. What does he write to you about? He writes often—doesn't he?"

"'Bout once a week," said Dicky.

"May I see his letter?" asked Mr. Furlong.

"I don't know," replied Dicky quickly. "I haven't read it yet."

There were a thousand things likely to be in that letter which might surprise Mr. Furlong to read. Dicky thrust it swiftly into his pocket, meaning to close the matter once and for all.

"Oh, of course, don't show it me if you don't wish to," said his father. "I have no curiosity to see it. But I don't think I quite like this exhibition of secrecy on your part, Dicky. You can't expect me to give you my confidence or treat you as I most earnestly wish to treat you, if you conceal things from me like that. A letter from Mr. Hollom to you can surely contain nothing but of the most ordinary nature in the world. Mind you, as I say, I'm not curious. But that was a thing I had often to tell your dear mother about. She would keep things to herself."

Anne looked quickly at Dicky and then left the room. Mr. Furlong scarcely noticed her going. He had discovered a subject upon which in this last year or so, since Christina's death, he had thought a great deal. He had hardly realised, in fact, how much he had thought about it until he began to speak.

"Don't you see," he continued, "how impossible it is for me to help you in any way if you don't give me the full measure of your confidence?"

"I spoke to you once about my painting," said Dicky.

"Oh, yes, about that, but then you can't expect me to take a thing like that seriously—that's—that's——"

"You took it seriously enough," said Dicky; "you tore up my sketch."

"I tore it up," replied Mr. Furlong sharply, "because it was foolish—there was no sense in it. You can't expect me to sympathise with you when you waste your time like that."

"If I waste my time," retorted Dicky, "I ought to be sympathised with. I don't waste it wilfully—I don't mean to do any harm—I believe I'm doing some good. If—if there's no sense in my sketches—" he stammered for his words—"if—if they're foolish, I—I ought to be pitied."

The heat of the moment lent him reason. It was not the gift of sympathy for which he pressed. At the back of all he said was a fierce defence of his art. In a moment, almost of inspiration, he rose to irony. His eyes were lit with it. A pause followed him before Mr. Furlong could reply. He was confronted again by that antagonism which he always met with in his son. Now, with the shafts of irony added to his defence, Mr. Furlong was for the moment confused and knew not where to strike.

"If what you paint is nonsense," he said then, suddenly, with a rising voice, "it's not so nonsensical as the things you say. How dare you argue with me—a boy of your age! I never heard anything so ridiculous as to suggest that I should sympathise with your folly because you're fool enough to waste your time. For goodness' sake try and talk sense, and then I'll listen to you. As it is, it annoys me to talk to you. Go and get to your work as soon as you've finished your breakfast."

"I've finished now," said Dicky.

"But you've eaten nothing!"

"I don't want anything."

"Eat your breakfast!" commanded Mr. Furlong sternly. "You do everything you possibly can to annoy me. Why don't you want to eat your breakfast?"

"Because whenever we have a row I don't feel inclined to do anything—certainly not eat."

"Oh—is that the way you look at it. *We* have a row. You suppose I have so little dignity as to have a row with you. I think the sooner you learn your place, my boy, the better. Try and cultivate manners to your elders, and then you'll realise that it's impossible for me to have a row—as you call it—with you."

He left the table then. He left the room. His own breakfast was but half finished on his plate. A sickness in his heart made it impossible for him to eat more. The food was dry in his throat. He went to his bedroom and for a long time sat there, wondering why Fate conspired against his affection for his son.

"If he would only understand," he said aloud; "if he would only understand that I wish the best, the very best for him——" It was not in the power of his mentality to realise that he was only excusing the want of understanding in himself.

To Dicky's surprise, in the Easter holidays, Mr. Hollom wrote saying that he had accepted Mr. Furlong's invitation to stay at the mill. After their disagreement which had arisen out of the schoolmaster's letter, he had imagined that Mr. Hollom would not be invited—a retribution for his insubordinate conduct.

But in such a case as this Mr. Furlong bore no malice. The idea certainly had entered his head to punish Dicky in this manner, but he had conquered his inclinations. Mr. Hollom, no doubt, was a good influence for Dicky; he might help him to be more steady in his work. Also, when Dicky had gone to bed, they would probably play chess together. Undoubtedly it would be a false policy to punish Dicky in that way, depriving him of a benefit in order to chastise him for a fault. He sat down and wrote to Mr. Hollom that evening.

He was the same tall, cadaverous-looking man when Dicky met him at the station in Pershore. His cheeks were thinner; his eyes set in deeper hollows than before. For some moments he stood looking at Dicky with a questioning, scrutinising gaze.

"What's happened to you, young man?" said he.

At once Dicky knew what he meant. He felt in himself he had changed.

"What do you mean—happened?" he asked.

"Well—you've changed. You're ten years older." He checked himself as he was about to add—"You're older than your father."

In the drive back to Eckington, Dicky had told him of all the conflict which for the most part waged silently between his father and himself.

"More and more every day," said he, "I hate the mill. It goes on just like the wheel—round and round and round."

"You're keeping your sketches?" asked Mr. Hollom.

Dicky nodded.

"Well—you'll show them to me to-morrow."

"Rather!" exclaimed Dicky.

It awakened poignant memories in Mr. Hollom's mind as he sat that evening in the sitting-room playing chess with Mr. Furlong. In a dim distant corner of his heart, he heard the faint chords of the Moonlight Sonata—echoes, withered, like the pale petals of a flower that long have been pressed between the pages of a book. Again he lost his game as he listened to them.

"You begin so well," said Mr. Furlong, as he swept the remaining pieces from the board, "I always think you're going to beat me."

"I don't concentrate enough," replied Mr. Hollom, "that's my one curse. If I could have concentrated half as much as Dicky can, for example, I might have done well."

Mr. Furlong smiled.

"Well," said he, "I see a good deal of Dicky, and I should never have said that of him."

To substantiate his statement, Mr. Hollom knew he would be compelled to refer to Dicky's painting. He saw the pitfall before him and, with careful tact, avoided it.

"I may be mistaken, of course," said he. "I know he showed little of it at school. But I see it in his eyes. He can concentrate if he likes."

"Ah—if he likes," said Mr. Furlong. "Yes—I

quite agree with you. His mother was just the same. She could concentrate over her music, but it was only with the greatest difficulty in the world that I could get her to keep the household accounts in regular order."

Mr. Hollom's mind went out in vain endeavour to see a virtue in Christina keeping household accounts. In that respect as a wife perhaps she had failed. He fell to wondering then if any man found the woman in his wife; or did he consciously shut his eyes to such understanding.

"Mind you," continued Mr. Furlong, rousing him from his meditation, "I don't think Dicky takes after his mother in many respects. Anne is more like her. There is something of the set and undeviating purpose about Anne which often reminds me of my poor wife. You'll see Anne to-morrow, and then you can tell me if you don't recognise what I mean. But Dicky's a Furlong all over. I don't want to pride myself at all, but I fancy he's got my imagination. He surprises me sometimes with the things he says. He likes Carlyle, too—reads him greedily. I had a great admiration for Carlyle once."

"Once?" queried Mr. Hollom.

"Yes, I can't say it's so great now; not since it has come out how he treated his wife. It takes away most terribly to me from the truth of all he's written."

"'There is force in the rotting of a leaf,'" quoted Mr. Hollom; "'how else could it rot,' or words to that effect. Has the truth gone out of that to you?"

"I suppose it's true enough," agreed Mr. Furlong ;
"but I don't like to think a man like that could have
written it. His was not the way to treat a wife."

Mr. Hollom held his breath and drove his hands
into his pockets. When the moment had passed, he
spoke of being tired and asked if he might go up to
his room. Mr. Furlong complained at once of his own
thoughtlessness, and lit him up the stairs.

As the door of his bedroom closed and he heard the
sound of Mr. Furlong's footsteps dying away, Mr.
Hollom smote the palm of one hand with the back of
the other. He said nothing. The gesture alone con-
veyed the words for all he felt. Something had to be
done for Dicky. He undressed, got into bed and, blow-
ing out the light, lay there thinking in the darkness.

CHAPTER IX

THE next day being the first of Mr. Hollom's visit, Dicky was allowed a complete holiday. On that day Anne was returning from a visit, paid to some friends in Tewkesbury. They had the morning to themselves. With a satchel containing some of his sketches, kept under lock and key in his bedroom, Dicky set out with Mr. Hollom to the oak tree. There, in the cupboard, also under lock and key, the remainder of his work had been stored. He talked of it eagerly as they walked. His eyes were brilliant with earnestness in everything he said. With his excitement he was reduced to gestures in his endeavour to express himself. Mr. Hollom's interest was keen in everything he said and did.

They came at last to the oak tree, the scene of still another important issue in Dicky's life. At last he was laying out the sketches, one by one, occasionally introducing them with brief remarks as he placed them in the schoolmaster's hands.

He showed no craving for approval ; never asked how he liked this or that, seeking for praise. One after another, with occasional explanatory preludes, he produced them from the almost inexhaustible store which he had collected.

When Mr. Hollom had been through them all he began to pick them out separately.

“What’s this?” he asked.

“Oh—that’s only a sky—the landscape doesn’t matter—I just put it in anyhow. It had been wet all day, and about four o’clock it began to clear in the west. It was like pulling a huge grey cloth off a slab of silver. The clouds rolled back, just as if a hand was dragging them. I sort of felt that I’d never mind a grey day again, because you’d only got to think there was that dazzling light behind it.”

“But how did you get that primrose part of the sky so full of light? You haven’t made the grey so very dark. There isn’t such a lot of contrast. How did you get it? I should have had to paint those rain clouds nearly black.”

Dicky tried to think how he had got it; but it brought no meaning to his mind.

“I don’t know,” he said at last. “I didn’t feel they were so very heavy. I think the way you feel things is the way you do them, and you can’t tell how or why you feel. Look at this one—a bit of the river. They always say that the sky reflected in water is never so light as the sky itself. Well, I don’t suppose it is when you go and sit down and say to yourself, now which is the lightest? But I couldn’t paint to save my life if I went and said things to myself.”

Mr. Hollom looked up at him.

“What do you do then, Dicky?”

"Well—I suppose I just feel. I felt the river was lighter than anything else that day. It—it meant light to me, much more than the sky did. I couldn't think of the sky when I looked at the water—I could only think of the water when I looked at the sky. You wanted to bathe in it. I did bathe, too, when I'd finished. See that smudge. That's where I chucked my trousers down."

Mr. Hollom smiled, remembering how careful he was with his own miserable sketches over which he took such time and such infinite pains. With deliberate intention he made no comment on those drawings which he looked at for the second time. It occurred to him to wonder why Dicky was not eager, as many another boy would have been, for praise. His only anxiety, it seemed, was to justify with explanation the effects he had endeavoured to produce. It was marvellous, when he considered it, how much of the theory of it all Dicky had learnt when the only master under whom he had worked had been his own conscience. One thing only he needed now—the leaven of discipline. They could never kill the originality of his genius now. It had found its soil; had thrown out its roots, and no formality of teaching could ever kill it. Yet if he persisted in the solitary study of his art, Mr. Hollom felt sure that the ultimate flower of this priceless plant would be abnormal, exotic, even distorted in its shape. In some of the sketches he had before him there were signs of it already. Freedom of brush they had, free-

dom of ideas ; but such freedom as offered to defy the common-law. He laid all the drawings down and lit a cigarette.

" Dicky," he asked presently ; " how much do you care for all this ? "

In the thrill of the moment Dicky said his mind.

" Oh—better than anything else in the world," he declared and, the moment he had said the words, a vision of Dorothy pleaded with him to take them back. Almost she succeeded. In the tone of Mr. Hollom's voice he knew that yet more was to be said. If he told him of his love for Dorothy, perhaps the suggestion he had in his mind would never be made. She begged him to take back his words. Again and again she recalled to him the memory of what he had said in answer to just such a question of hers. It came to the edge of his lips then to say that one thing in life there was he loved better than his work ; but he heard the words and knew all their meaning before he uttered them. With a bitter feeling of self-contempt, he closed his eyes to the vision of Dorothy and kept his silence.

" You're prepared to risk everything for it ? " continued Mr. Hollom.

" Everything ! " said Dicky stoutly.

" Supposing it came to running away from the mill—would you go ? "

" Where ? "

" To London."

Dicky's eyes found another light.

"Yes—like a shot."

"You might starve."

"No—I wouldn't."

"What 'ud you do?"

"Get work somewhere—any sort. There are classes at the schools in the evenings. I found that out. They don't cost much."

"It 'ud be a rough life after the mill, you know," said Mr. Hollom.

"Rough! What 'ud that matter? I should be working."

"Yes, and supposing you went under. I should be all to blame. It 'ud be my fault. Think what your mother would say to me if she'd been alive."

"Don't see that it 'ud be your fault," exclaimed Dicky. "I'm going anyway, whatever happens. I began saving up last year. As soon as I've got enough, I shall go."

"How much have you got?"

"Nearly a pound—eighteen and ninepence. In three weeks more it'll be a pound."

"My dear boy—a pound's no good to you. You'll have to keep yourself in rooms till you get work."

"How much would that cost?" asked Dicky.

"Depends how long you were in finding work. It might be some weeks. Now listen to what I've got to say. I know, if you're going to be any good, you must get away from the mill. Your mother once told me

she wanted you to be an artist, and if I can help, I'm going to. I'm going to give you ten pounds."

Dicky's breath jerked in his throat.

"You can start in London with that. If you should want more, I'll send you more. It'll be no good you ever telling your father that I've helped you to it. Possibly after you're gone, he'll never want to see you again. Are you prepared for that?"

Dicky nodded his head.

"You'll probably cut yourself adrift from your own home, and have none left but of your own making. Are you prepared for that? Don't just nod your head. Let me hear you say yes."

"Yes," said Dicky firmly.

"I'll give you some introductions to people in London. They're not much good. None of them are artists, but they may help you to get some work. And now, when do you think you'd better go? Would you like to go while I'm here? Perhaps I could explain a bit to your father after you've gone, and make things a little easier."

"I'll go in June," said Dicky.

His eyes had opened again. Against his will he was seeing once more the vision of Dorothy; her arms were round his neck as she had drawn them that night on Eekington bridge; her lips were warm and clinging to his.

"I'll go in June," he said again.

"Right," said Mr. Hollom. "I shall send you the money just before you go. Let's get back."

They returned to the mill, walking slowly. For five minutes they said nothing. Their minds were full of thoughts, speeding hot foot upon them. At last Mr. Hollom turned his head and looked at Dicky.

“Why June?” he asked.

The blood rushed burning into Dicky’s cheeks.

“I can’t till June,” said he, and said no more.

When they reached the white wicket gate between the laurels Mr. Hollom stood still. He saw a woman’s figure bent over a bed in the garden. Her arms were full of daffodils that leant against her cheeks.

“Hallo, old girl!” shouted Dicky, a higher note than usual in his voice. “Here’s Mr. Hollom!”

Anne looked up.

That evening the schoolmaster lost at chess again. It was not only memories he listened to. Anne played to them in the other room.

CHAPTER X

IT was now that Dicky felt the bonds of his enchantment. A fear came to him that night when he thought of how he must tell Dorothy of his departure. In the meeting of their lips on the bridge at Eckington, the cry of the earth had clarioned in his ears. And it was hard to make sacrifice of the earth now, even when the call of highest purpose was bidding him set forth on man's adventure.

He knew quite well that he would go, just as a man may know the Fate that is awaiting him; but how he was to leave her when every moment's beating of his heart rushed hot with the memory of that kiss and cried for more, was far beyond his saying. Just as a man who, hearing he is condemned, knows his powerlessness against the law, yet wonders at his power of inevitable submission, so Dicky marvelled in his heart to think that day in June would really come when he would bid good-bye to Dorothy. It would have been best, he knew, to have gone then and at once, before the taste of other kisses sharpened the pain of parting. But he played with the fire, heating that crucible in the hollow of which every man's soul must meet its test. The strength and virtue of the hundred men had

gone from him. In that moment on Eckington Bridge, the Romance of life had changed in Dicky's mind. The first essential in Romance is a boundless freedom, the untrammelled liberty over life and death.

But in his love for Dorothy, Dicky no longer held that power. He was a slave, and the Romance had gone. Now he loved as a man is meant to love, as every woman means that he shall love, as Nature stirs in her to bring that love to pass. All the freedom he could see, lay out in the world beyond that paradise in Eckington holding the woman for whom he cared. All the longing of his mind leaned out to reach that freedom to his grasp, for there was his Romance. And so within him, even then, began that conflict which makes the everlasting antagonism between men and women. So nearly are the forces weighed, so nearly matched the one against the other, that who can say which banner is the right. Dicky fought, just as the other men have fought before him.

And it is seldom the easy victim whom a woman seeks. The spirit of noble combat lies in her soul as well as his. The greater the heart in her, the greater the heart she seeks in battle. And sometimes the greatest heart may beat in the breast of the gentlest woman in the world. Despite all her gentleness there was a greatness of heart in Dorothy Leggatt.

When the next evening they met and she heard that Dicky was going away, Dorothy's heart stood still within her. This was the challenge to which she

knew she must answer. In that sudden moment, she felt herself called into the bewildering struggle for life. Until then she had been but a spectator. All things had passed by before her eyes. Even the tragedy of her mother's folly had not caught her in its tide. She had seen it go by, but had never been drawn into the eddies as it thundered past. Now, with just those few words from Dicky, she was swept into the stream. In one brief moment the knowledge that she must strive had reached her. At first it was bewildering, overwhelming. She could not believe that Fate could be so cruel. She, too, then, in the back of her mind, was conscious that he would go; that with his going their love was to be put to all the hazard of chance, wherein the whole world of women was her common enemy. The thought of this was almost unendurable. The hatred of her sex, which at times comes to all women, pressed swiftly on her then. In that one second of time she knew them to be incapable of trust. And one by one these realisations crowded in upon her. She could not speak.

They were sitting by the side of the river, far down from the weir where it winds below the hill. For the first half hour since they had met, Dicky had been struggling with the words he had to say. Hesitating and slow in taking his opportunities, they had one and all slipped from him. At last, in a pause, he had said it, blindly, as a man strikes in his own defence when the odds are crowding on him.

She had been holding his hand and, in the silence that followed, let it fall. He waited, saying no more. The thin branch of a willow leaning down into the water swayed and quivered as the river hurried by. He found himself counting the possibilities it offered of catching the things that floated past. A last year's leaf came swirling down. The willow branch had caught it. In its struggles to get free, he felt an echo of the struggle in himself. He was the leaf. She was the branch of willow. The moment she had dropped his hand, he knew their conflict had begun. When at last he glanced at her face, he found her lip was quivering.

"Oh, Dorothy!" he exclaimed, and locked his arms about her.

"Don't go, Dicky," she whispered brokenly. "Don't go. I couldn't bear it here alone."

"My dear darling, I shan't be gone for always," he whispered back.

"Oh, but it'll never be the same if you go," she replied. "It'll never be the same as it is now. You'll be different when you come back. You'll never be Dicky again if you go now. I want you always to be the Dicky you are here. Think how fearfully happy we shall be."

All strength in Dicky turned to water as he listened to the note of weeping in her voice.

"But I can't stay on in the mill," he replied gently. "How could I?"

"Why not?" she answered quickly. "One of these days you'll have it all to yourself and then we can be married. Oh, Dicky! Nobody in the world 'ud ever be so happy as we should be."

"I know," said he. "I know. But we shall be married all the same. When I've done some real good painting, p'raps the pater 'll be proud of me, then. P'raps he'll let me have some money, and we can be married just the same."

"Oh, but when would that be?" she complained. "Not for years and years and years. Oh, Dicky, don't go! You won't mind the mill so much if we're married. You can go on painting your pictures just the same. I'll always come out and sit with you, and we'll have them framed and you can hang them up in the rooms."

Then, dimly, Dicky knew, vaguely it reached his understanding. But it seemed to him as if it were not love she felt at all. What her feelings were it was completely beyond him to comprehend; but it could not be love. She did not care that he should be a great painter. How could she possibly say then that she loved? He might go on painting pictures! They would have them framed, would hang them up in their rooms! It needed all the strength he possessed to control his voice to quietness.

"You don't understand a bit," he said presently, and the bitterness he felt was in every note of his voice. "I don't want to paint pictures to hang up in the mill."

What 'ud be the good of that? Nobody would ever see them."

She turned and looked at him. Her lip was quivering again. But now she faced him with the truth. It was the only weapon that remained.

"Dicky," she said bravely, "you don't care for me more than anything else in the world. You care for your painting best—don't you?"

It is a heavy but a mighty weapon is the truth. Only in her extremest hour will a woman use it in her own defence. Dicky shuddered as the blow fell on him. He turned away and could not meet her eyes. The river lapped and gurgled through the reeds as it hurried by. A bat wheeled over their heads, tumbling away into the darkness. She caught his arm.

"Dicky," she repeated, and there was terror in her voice. "You care for that best, don't you?"

She had only spoken the truth before. She knew it now. Yet again and again she tried to make him say the lie, clinging to him with both her hands, her tearful eyes pleading to his averted face. The lie would have satisfied her. She would have known indeed how much a lie it was; but if only he would say it, pride alone would have forced him to live up to it.

It is the man a woman wants and once she loves, she will bind him to her with a lie if the truth should fail to hold.

But Dicky could not answer. It was when his silence had broken down her courage that at last she turned away.

"Dorothy!" said he, "where are you going?"

She did not answer. Her feet were moving. She let them move.

"Dorothy!" he called again; but she did not turn round. One step he took to follow her, then held himself in check. A sudden instinct warned him then that if he followed, the victory would be hers. With clenched hands and fast set teeth he looked the other way. So on into the greyness of the evening Dorothy walked with ears alert to catch his hastening footsteps in pursuit.

At a stile that led from the meadows on to the road she waited, knowing that he would come that way. But Dicky never came. Weighed down with the bitterness of all he had lost, Dicky had gone away across the hill into the darkness. Long into that night he lay on a bed of bracken beneath the scattered oak trees on the hill and the tears were hot upon his cheeks.

After an hour had passed, Dorothy turned her face towards home. Her shoulders shook convulsively as she walked. In one short day she had learnt how terrible life can be.

CHAPTER XI

At supper that evening Dicky's chair was empty. Mr. Furlong looked his annoyance.

"If there is one thing I do abominate more than another," he said, with irritation, "it is unpunctuality. I don't find it impossible to be in time for meals, but Dicky's continually and systematically late. Five minutes before a meal, he suddenly finds something he wants to do. There's no sense of order in his mind at all. I can't think where he gets it from. It's no characteristic of mine."

He walked impatiently to the window, pulled aside the blind, and peered out into the gathering darkness.

"Oh, we'll begin without him," he exclaimed at last with annoyance and, coming back to the table, he assumed a different tone of voice in which he said grace. Mr. Hollom and Anne glanced across the table at each other, saying the "Amen" at its conclusion with a solemnity of expression by no means indicative of what they had in mind.

During the meal they talked of many things, but in every pause, Mr. Furlong looked at the empty chair and said, "I wonder where that boy Dicky is?" His sense

of order was so disturbed that he could not properly enjoy his food.

"He may have gone to supper at the Leggatts'," suggested Anne at last.

"Then why hasn't he let us know? I believe he thinks he can use this house as an hotel, coming in and going out just when he pleases."

Mr. Hollom kept silence. He could not quite trust himself to say anything. This attitude of Mr. Furlong's mind was more than he could understand. He only realised how utterly impossible it was for Dicky to stay on beneath such an influence if ever he were to do anything in the service of Art. Above all, he needed liberty—liberty of spirit, liberty of mind. Even so trivial an incident as this convinced him that there was but little liberty for Dicky at the mill.

But it was not only on this account that he was glad when the meal was over. All that day he had been waiting for an opportunity to be alone with Anne. None had offered. His only chance lay now in that half hour when Mr. Furlong rested after his meal before they played chess. He liked to be talked to for that half hour certainly, but it might easily be avoided.

When grace was said at the meal's conclusion, he announced that he had letters to write and would go to his room.

"Are you going to play the piano?" he asked of Anne as he departed. This would take her into the other room alone, when he could come down and speak to her.

In a few moments he was preparing to leave his bedroom when Anne's playing ceased. He stopped at the head of the stairs and listened.

"I thought I'd come over and smoke a pipe," said a man's voice in the hall below.

There followed then the sound of Mr. Furlong's greetings.

"Dicky's been having supper with you, I suppose," he added, as he helped his guest off with his coat.

Mr. Hollom assumed that this was Mr. Leggatt. He waited, listening for the answer.

"Dicky?" said Mr. Leggatt after a pause, and in that pause the old Cromwellian clock ticked out into the silence. "No, he's not had supper with us—why—hasn't he been here?"

"No," said Mr. Furlong. There was a note other than annoyance in his voice—a note of querulousness, of uncertainty. Again the Cromwellian clock filled the silence. "It's nearly nine o'clock," said Mr. Furlong again in a moment, "I wonder what's become of him?"

"Oh—he'll turn up in a few minutes," replied Mr. Leggatt unconvincingly and he followed Mr. Furlong into the sitting-room. The door closed. The school-master heard no further but the dim murmur of their voices. There was no more playing of the piano, however. He knew then that his chance had gone and at last he came downstairs.

"Can you imagine what's become of Dicky?" Mr. Furlong asked, the moment he entered the room.

"Probably rambling somewhere or other," replied Mr. Hollom. "I don't think there's any need for you to be alarmed."

Catching a worried glance in Anne's eyes, he suggested cheerfully that they should play a game of bezique. She agreed at once, and the cards were got out. They played in silence while the two men sat in their arm-chairs, smoked, and made desultory conversation. At every sound outside the house, whenever a dog barked, they became silent; Anne laid down her cards and listened. After a few moments had gone by, the conversation began again, and Anne continued with the game.

Once Mr. Furlong got up from his chair, leaving the room. They heard him opening the door in the hall outside. Again they listened. When he returned, Anne's eyes searched his face.

"There's no moon," he said. "It's a terribly dark night."

Mr. Hollom leant across the table and whispered beneath his breath, "I can't bear to see you looking worried like that. Dicky's all right. He's probably gone for a long walk. He's got a lot to think about."

Anne smiled at him gratefully. For a time her spirits seemed to rise.

"How's Dorothy, Mr. Leggatt?" she asked presently.

"Dorothy? First rate, I think, Anne. Wasn't she with you this afternoon? She came in just as we were sitting down to supper."

"No—I haven't seen her to-day," she replied, and the apprehension came back again into her eyes. Mr. Hollom watched every expression of her face.

The desultory conversation then began again, continuing fitfully until, in a moment of silence, the Cromwellian clock struck the hour of ten. Stroke by stroke the chime fell on their ears. When it stopped, and while they could still hear the dim vibration of sound, Mr. Furlong rose to his feet once more.

"I can't stand this any longer," he said nervously. "That boy must be somewhere. He's got nothing to keep him out till this time of night if he isn't at your place, Leggatt. Will you come out with me, Hollom, and see if we can find him?"

"Of course," said Mr. Hollom readily.

"I'll come too, Furlong," said Mr. Leggatt. "If we separate and set up a call, he's bound to hear us. There's no wind—it's only dark."

"I'm going to come, too," Anne whispered to Mr. Hollom and, as they walked down the path to the wicket gate, he found her beside him in the darkness.

"Hadn't one of us better go down to the river?" suggested Mr. Furlong while they stood for a moment in conversation outside the gate.

"I'll come with you, Furlong," said Mr. Leggatt. "They'd better go straight along the road to the hill."

So they agreed to it. As they moved off into the darkness, they heard Mr. Furlong say in an uncertain

voice, "Do you know, I've regretted all my life that I never took to the water when I was a boy."

"Can't you swim?" asked Mr. Leggatt.

"No, but I know how to do the stroke. I know how to use my arms and legs."

Their voices then died away into the darkness and Mr. Hollom set out with Anne along the road.

"I'm quite sure," he said presently, "that your father's really very fond of Dicky."

"Yes, I know," she replied. "It's only that he doesn't understand. He didn't understand mother a bit."

The face of Christina rose into Mr. Hollom's memory. For one instant he saw her distinctly; then her features became confused with the features of Anne. He leant down a little in the darkness and looked at her.

"Anne," he said suddenly, using her Christian name for the first time, "you're not to worry about Dicky."

He listened intently to the silence that followed his use of her name. An acute sense of instinct with which Nature supplies a man in these moments, told him that she had noticed and was not opposed to it. It was a stone on which to step. The next was to draw her attention to what he had done.

"Do you mind my calling you by your Christian name?" he asked. "I used to call you Anne—do you remember—when I stayed here before?"

"Yes—I remember," she replied.

"Of course it makes a difference now; you're very

much grown up. But I don't expect you feel very different, do you?"

"Well—it's not quite the same, is it?" said she. "Every girl feels a little different when she puts her hair up."

"You'd rather I didn't call you Anne, then?" he asked quickly.

"No—I—I think I like you to."

He knew then. He knew he had won. All that lay before him now were those glorious hours whilst he would lead her into the presence of love, that same love which he had spoken of to Christina, which one day soon he would be telling to Anne herself. For the moment he asked do more. You learn quickly that these hours and days are the most precious of all.

With Christina it had been different. There had been but one moment, a moment filled as much with pleasure as with pain. He had taken it then, rather than lose it altogether. But this with Anne was different now. He knew all the days he had before him and, with the delight almost of an epicure, was content to pause and dally with the feast before his eyes.

A sudden sound of voices calling, came to them through the darkness from the river side. They stopped at once, leaning their heads towards it.

"Dicky! Dicky!"

They dimly heard his name and waited for the answering cry, but there was none.

"I don't know what I should do if anything has happened to him," said Anne tearfully.

"I don't think you have the slightest need to worry," replied Mr. Hollom. "I must tell you what happened yesterday. It'll probably explain a good deal."

He related then all that had taken place between himself and Dicky in the oak tree.

"When I asked him," he concluded, "if he'd like to go away at once, while I was here, he said, 'No, not now. I'll go in June.' Do you know why he waits till June?"

Had it not been for the darkness, he might have seen her smile.

"Didn't he tell you anything about himself?" she asked presently.

"No—nothing except about his painting."

"Nothing about Dorothy Leggatt?"

"Oh—I see," said he. "I might have understood that—one's generally so quick to realise other people's love affairs—so slow to realise one's own. What's she like?"

"She's got brown hair and grey eyes," began Anne.

He laughed.

"No—I don't mean that," said he. "I don't suppose you could really tell me what I want to know. Well, you can see now, can't you, why Dicky's out so late."

"But Dorothy's not with him. Mr. Leggatt said he left her at home."

"Yes—so he did. Well, then, I wonder what he is doing. You may be sure, at any rate, that it has something to do with his going away. Dicky's a queer chap, you know. There are a lot of things he likes to do all by himself. Even at the school, he used to have his own little schemes and keep them secret."

"Dicky! Dicky!"

They heard the cry again, still further, still fainter than before. There was no reply.

"Hadn't you better call too?" asked Anne. A sudden fear seemed to contract her throat. Her voice was husky.

Mr. Hollom raised his hands to his mouth, made a hollow shell of them, and called.

"Dick! Dicky!"

They stood quite still and listened. Out of the branches of an elm tree, an owl swept out with a rushing wing. One instant they saw it black in the darkness.

"Do you think he could hear that in the oak tree?" asked Mr. Hollom. "Because that's where he is—I'm sure of it."

"He ought to be able to," said Anne. "But why doesn't he answer? He must know how worried we should be."

"He's not thinking of other people just now," Mr. Hollom assured her. "Dicky's up against himself, and that's who he's thinking about. Come on—let's go on towards the hill—that's where we shall find him."

He tried his best to say it cheerfully, but hope was somewhat misgiving in him now. The thought that something might have happened to Dicky was no longer an impossibility, but a fear. Yet even as a fear he could not credit it. Destiny had Dicky in his hands, and Destiny would not so easily let him go.

"Dicky's very strange sometimes, you know," said Anne as they hurried on. "When mother died, I used to think sometimes that he was going mad. He used to creep away so much alone. It was a long, long time before I could get him back to be himself again."

"I wish I'd had a sister like you, Anne."

"Why?"

He hesitated and then, without answering, put up his hands to his mouth once more and cried out Dicky's name. They stopped to listen then again went on in silence.

As they reached the foot of the hill they stood still. A noise had come at the same moment to their ears. In the darkness, Mr. Hollom held her hand they bent forward, straining to catch the faintest sound.

"Did you hear too?" whispered Anne.

"Yes—it was a twig cracking or something—listen."

"P'raps it's only a sheep."

"No—listen—I can hear steps—Dicky?"

"What is it?" came Dicky's voice through the blackness which surrounded them. "Whatever's the matter?"

"We've been hunting the whole country side for you, you young villain—that's what's the matter. Where've you been? What have you been doing?"

"I've been up there in the wood. Is the pater out looking for me, too?"

"Dicky," said Anne, as she took his arm closely in her hands. "You've give us all a terrible fright."

"You'd better go and find your father, young man, and let him know you're all right. He's hunting for you down by the river."

Dicky freed himself from the tightening of Anne's fingers and, with his hands deep in his pockets, slouched off once more out of sight.

"He's been hit, and hit badly," said Mr. Hollom when he had gone. "I suppose it's all good for him. It's the way women make men. One woman brings a child into the world and another sets to work to make a man of him. It's an interesting business. I wonder whom the world needs most, the woman who makes or the man who's made. I suppose it's the proverbial six of one to the old half-dozen of the other."

CHAPTER XII

IN the days that followed their parting by the river, Dicky was almost like one who has lost his reason. It did not escape the schoolmaster's notice; but he said nothing. Anne had told him what she knew of Dorothy; told it with those exhortations to secrecy which are the first delicious moments as love dawns in a flush upon a grey horizon.

All that likeness to Christina which Mr. Furlong had spoken of, Mr. Hollom saw in Anne and more beside. Love had already got the bandage about his eyes. He realised none of those characteristics, the lack of imagination, the absence of impulse which, inheriting from her father, she so differed from Christina. He saw her mother's eyes, her mother's forehead, her mother's hair. He heard Christina playing whenever Anne sat down to the piano. Though there was no comparison in their abilities, his imagination supplied all that Anne lacked. Not once did he realise it, but it was Christina whom he loved, Christina who dominated him all through his life.

"They've quarrelled," Anne told him one day. "I've seen Dorothy and she never said a word about him."

"Shall I speak to Dicky?" Mr. Hollom suggested.

"No—no—don't! He'll know I've told you then. They'll make it up. I could see Dorothy had been crying."

But theirs was more than a quarrel. It needed more than mere making up. Dicky had but to give his promise that he would not go to London and Dorothy had been again in his arms, whispering those gentle consolations with which a woman ever bathes the wound she has inflicted. Yet distraught as Dicky was with the pressing need of her, some quality in him was sterner than to let that promise be made. Something he knew must be done, some alternative be raised to mend the rift which had come between them. The thought of making that promise came many times to his mind, but with every fresh consideration of it, he knew its impossibility the more. It was not that love was not worth it. Love was worth more to him than he had ever imagined. A voice of conscience it was forbidding him. That vague and intangible ideal which men know as truth, and of which they so seldom approach understanding, this was the real voice that called him. If he lived on in Eckington, he would be living a lie. He put the thought away from him, taking an oath beneath his breath that he would forget her.

"I'll go before June," he muttered to himself. "I'll go while old Hollom's here."

That evening, after supper he contrived to get Mr. Hollom alone.

"I'm not going to wait till June," said he. "I'm going to-morrow."

Mr. Hollom took his arm.

"What's the matter, old chap?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Dicky.

"Yes—but why have you changed your mind?"

"Because—because I suppose it would be better while you're here. You can say something to the pater after I've gone."

"You won't tell me, then?" said Mr. Hollom.

"Nothing to tell," said Dick stiffly.

"Well—I'm afraid you can't go to-morrow."

"Why not?"

"I've got to get that money for you first. I don't walk about with ten pounds in my pocket. I must write those letters of introduction, too."

"They wouldn't take long," said Dicky.

"No—they wouldn't. Still, there's the money."

"Could I go the day after to-morrow?"

Mr. Hollom smiled.

"No. I couldn't get it as soon as that. Why don't you tell me why you've changed your mind? P'raps I can help."

"You couldn't help," muttered Dicky, and the tears were perilously near his eyes. "Nobody can help. I'm miserable—that's all, and I want to get away."

Mr. Hollom laid his hand on his shoulder.

"I'll have the money for you in a few days," said he.

"And remember, you'll have a hard time of it. Don't

imagine you're going away to a land flowing with milk and honey. You're going to a city of fogs and misery, and you won't be able to live as a lot of them do to forget the misery that's all round them. You'll be in the thick of it. Often and often you'll be one of those miserable ones yourself. What do you think it'll be like to go without a meal now and then?"

"I shan't care," said Dicky.

"My dear boy, you'll care just as much as anybody else does. You'll hate the people who crowd into the restaurants as you go by with an empty stomach. Life'll show you its disappointments then. You think it's shown you enough now. But you wait till your pictures come back and come back till you're sick of the sight of them. You wait till you give your first little show in your first little studio. Count the people who come to see your pictures, and compare them with the number you hoped would come. And when they've all gone, never buying a single thing, remember what I've been saying now. Disappointment, my dear boy! You don't know the first letter of it."

All these were words to Dicky. They had no meaning to deter him. He listened quietly to all that Mr. Hollom said, and with such attention as that the schoolmaster began at last to believe he had dissuaded him from going.

"Well," he concluded at length. "Do you still want to go?"

And Dicky, who all the time had been thinking how

there must still be more days when he could see Dorothy if he chose, replied that he did.

“But I won’t see her,” he added in silence to himself. “I must go and go alone, and go without saying good-bye.”

“Have you listened to what I have been saying?” asked Mr. Hollom shrewdly.

“Yes,” said Dicky, and told his lie calmly with a steady eye on Mr. Hollom’s face.

CHAPTER XIII

THE next day was Sunday, three days before Dicky was to leave the mill.

It was one of those moments in the year when summer steals a march on spring, and looks upon the country side she is so soon to wed. There are such magic days in the earth's mythology. It is as when a god looks forth from out Olympus to see some unsuspecting maiden stepping down into the water as she goes to bathe.

In every thorn bush and in every tree, the birds were fast a-building. As the sun rose in the morning sky their choruses began, the chirp of sparrows in the eaves, the twittering of finches in the hedgerows. From the dense brambles bursting into leaf, the blackbirds scattered at each disturbing sound. A speeding glimpse of the yellow beak, the deep-throat gurgle of the frightened note, and they had vanished in the thicket. Upon their nests, already built, the thrushes sat with watching eyes, so still they might have been a carving out of wood. From twig to twig the wrens hopped, piping in their shrillest voice. Close to their nests in the hedges the warblers lingered harbouring in the willows near at

hand, lest the passer-by on the river side should guess the secret in their hearts.

The whole world was mating, and all the earth in bud. Beneath that beating sun of the precocious summer the buds upon the may trees broke their bonds, the apple-blossom spread to fainter pink. In the still heat as the day drew on, the cowslips dropped their heavy heads. Only the kingcups by the water's edge stood up erect and turned their glittering faces to the sun.

Like a maiden setting out to meet her lover, the meadows scented themselves with flowers; from the hedges the warm honeyed perfume of the gorse, from the edge of every stream the scent of mint that made one breathe again.

Yet to Dicky when he rose, the whole world seemed a sorry place. Like a bird with a broken wing for whom there is no mating, he rose in the morning to face another day—another day within call of Dorothy, another day when he might yet bring her to his side. But his determination was firmly set. A few more hours of it he surely had the strength to bear. To his father he complained of a headache, and said he could not go to church.

“Unless it's very bad,” said Mr. Furlong, “I don't think you ought to let it interfere with your duty. You wouldn't be the first person who'd suffered pain rather than miss their day of worship. It's not much to ask of any one, one day in every week. Don't you think you'd like to go?”

"Well—it is very bad," Dicky replied. "I couldn't pay proper attention. I don't think I'll go," and he half closed his eyes in proof of the pain that he was suffering.

Mr. Furlong said no more ; therefore Dicky watched them depart with their gloves and their prayer-books, taking a deep breath of relief as he heard the click of the wicket gate and knew that he was alone.

"I never believe," said Mr. Furlong as they walked along the road towards Eckington ; "I never believe in forcing a boy to go to church when he doesn't feel like it. That's not the way to cultivate the religious spirit."

"I think you're quite right," agreed Mr. Hollom. "Force would never make anything out of Dicky."

These words penetrated into Mr. Furlong's mind. For some time as he walked, he was silent. The suspicion that sometimes he may have forced Dicky was there, lurking in his mind. For a moment he wondered if he really knew himself, then put the disquieting thought aside.

"I've brought my children up," he said to himself, "with love and gentleness. No one can ever say I have not loved Dicky." The proof of it came warmly to his mind when he remembered how he had prayed that morning when the shepherd had brought Dicky back upon his shoulders. "If I have urged him to take interest in the mill," he continued, in argument with himself, "it is because I know that one day he will thank me for it."

His thoughts at last were distracted from the unpleasant subject as they passed Dorothy Leggatt upon the road.

"What—not going to church, Dorothy?" he asked.

She shook her head shyly and she smiled at Anne. Anne glanced at Mr. Hollom.

"Dicky's playing truant, too," Mr. Furlong called over his shoulder with a laugh. "He's got a headache." Then in a serious voice to Mr. Hollom, he continued as they walked along. "I don't suppose he is playing truant for a moment. I could see he was in pain from the way his eyes were all puckered up. My eyes go just like that when I have a headache."

A moment later, Anne looked back along the road. Dorothy was still pursuing her way towards the mill.

"Does she know Dicky's going so soon?" she whispered to Mr. Hollom when a moment offered.

He shook his head.

"Not that I know of," he whispered back.

"She's guessed then."

"How could she?" he replied.

But this was a question which women do not answer. Anne shook her head.

How far she was right it were impossible to say. A dim apprehension indeed was stirring in Dorothy's mind. She had waited an hour by the stile that evening; she had waited every day of all the days that had passed since then. Any one of those nights, had she looked out of her bedroom window, she might have seen a

figure that she knew, passing and re-passing, again and again ; gazing and always gazing at the room where, all unconscious, she lay awake with the tears hot and heavy in her eyes. Had she but known of this, there might have been less need for apprehension then ; but, knowing nothing, every thought within her was beset with doubt.

Of the knowledge of men, Nature supplies a woman with a ready equipment. Before she has touched the fringe of life, instinctively she knows when to beware, when to trust, and when to fear.

There was much of the truth in what Anne had said ; there was still more of the truth in her silence to Mr. Hollom's question. Dorothy had guessed, even if she had not guessed the truth. In Dicky's prolonged silence, she knew that some decision must have formed within his mind. It was not that she knew that he was going away at once but, in the countless possibilities which passed across her thoughts, this had indeed been one.

With no considered plan or choice of action, she obeyed a dim consciousness of motive that morning. The desire was strong in her to see Dicky again, to speak with him once more, to tell him, if it must be, that he might go without the pain of her complaining. How she would find him, she had not thought. Only by instinct did her feet lead her in the direction of the mill. When she heard that he had not gone to church, her heart grew more expectant in its beating. But with no quality of the organisation of ideas, with no power

to scheme or plan their meeting, she yet had determined that that morning should bring him to her once again.

Now, it was distantly visible in her mind that of a certainty he would go ; indeed, that she must let him go. Yet this was not really an admission of defeat. She loved him so much, it seemed that even Fate could not separate them. There was, moreover, a deeper sense than this, a sense of bargain in her heart. If she had courage to bid him go, might she not then win him a thousand times nearer to her than before ; and if so near, could he ever forget or leave her then ?

Here was the most subtle Nature moving in her heart, leading her to that completion of purpose which Nature has designed for a woman's making or undoing. She was prepared to yield up everything ; without a sound of murmur or whisper of complaint, she was ready to let him go and leave her there in Eckington alone. And who can say how well she knew that this would bring him to her heart in direst need of her ?

It is the woman who gives up everything who wins in a fair fight. It is the woman who gives up everything who is the most potent enemy a man may have. To her submission he yields his freedom ; but fought with his own weapons the man of any courage rebels.

To this note of victory then, sounding in her heart, the victory of submission, Dorothy was walking that Sunday morning when all the birds were mating and all the may trees were in bud.

CHAPTER XIV

FROM that very window where once Christina had watched him set forth, Dicky now saw Dorothy pass by along the road to Bredon. At the first unexpected sight of her, he stepped back quickly into the room, feeling that sickness which the sudden beating of the heart will bring. As when some distance from a dizzy height, you still may feel its power to draw you to the edge, so Dicky felt the magnetic call of love, crying to him to follow her, to overtake her and at once.

Therefore he stepped back into the room, not merely that he might not be seen by her, but as a man starts back upon the very edge of some abyss. He knew already the struggle that was before him, but there and then made firm his determination that Dorothy should go alone.

"It's the whole of my life," he told himself with a strange precociousness of foresight. "I can't stay here in the mill."

Then he turned and left the room, wandering from one bedroom to another till he came to that occupied by Anne, from which also he could see along the road to Bredon. Dorothy was still in sight. If he stood, half-concealed by the curtain, she could not see him

from where she was. He took the point of vantage and watched her.

Why was she not at church? How had she escaped it? Mr. Leggatt was as strict as his father. And why had she come out here? The thought that it was in search of him set his heart bounding again. His fingers clutched tightly on the curtain that he held.

But now he showed his first weakness; he began to argue with himself that his determination not to follow her was right. It must be right. He knew too well his need of her. As well as he knew the shame and self-contempt that he would feel if he gave up the life that lay before him. Why had she wished him to give it up? In a few years' time, no matter what Mr. Hollom may have said, he would be selling his pictures; even if his father did refuse to support him, he would be making enough for them to be married. How could women ask these things? What should they want of a man but the best work that he could do? Was there any meaning in the life of a man beside that?

An uncomfortable thought that he was forcing himself to ask these questions suddenly confronted him. Love was a meaning he could not deny. He loved Dorothy no less because of what she had asked of him. To see her then, as she walked slowly by the hedges, drew forth every instinct within him to follow after her.

Would it matter so much if he did? After all, he was going. He was going in a few days. He had

made up his mind to that. Why should it be impossible for him to say good-bye? Something in the mere thought of that brought the sense of Romance that lies in renunciation to his mind. Their parting would be full of pain; but was it not more a pain that he welcomed than feared? Perhaps she might cry when she heard that he was going so soon.

He went straightway downstairs into the hall and took his cap from the rack. But he had sworn that he would not follow her. Again and again he twisted his cap round in his fingers. Until that moment he had believed that he had great strength of purpose. Now he was coming to realise that he had none. Possibly by now she was out of sight. The greater temptation to follow her then would be gone.

He ran upstairs again; straight to the window where he had seen her first. The road was empty. He threw open the window and listened. The choir of all the voices of spring was trembling in the air. Everything vibrated with it. Suddenly he knew that the day was beautiful; he felt all the scent of summer carried in every breeze. The warm air blew on his face. His eyes were glittering with excitement. It was not clear to him what he had expected to hear through that open window, but it was only the sounds of spring that came to his ears. And Dorothy was gone. Had she returned to Eckington? Had she gone on towards the hill? So far from deterring him from following her, the fact that she was out of sight only increased his

eagerness to pursue. In his desire to discover whether she had returned to Eckington, he forgot all his determination, forgot that for the moment he had hoped to find her gone that he might not follow her.

Without shutting the window, he turned again and ran downstairs. He was breathing quickly now. It was expedient by this to every desire within him that he should find out whether she had returned to Eckington or gone on towards the hill. It was not his intention to meet her. That still could easily be avoided. If he came within view of her, he could keep at a safe distance. He could conceal himself behind some tree, some hedge. She need never know that he had followed her that day.

The hall door slammed noisily after him as he hurried out. The birds in the laurels scattered as he swung after him the wicket gate. The heat of a passion he had never known so strong was on him as he set off running down the road. With every step the desire to find her grew more urgent, more importunate in his mind. With every step the thoughts of the future yielded one by one to the pressing demands of the present. He determined he would find her then, if he must search till it was dark.

As he reached the first turning in the road, he stayed his running, walking closely by the hedge side as he came round the corner into view of the next stretch of road. No one was to be seen. The sun was beating down. There were deep shadows under the grass edges.

A load of straw had not long passed that way, the branches of a may tree had stretched out and caught stray threads of it, still holding them like gold embroidery upon their cloth of green. Signs of life were everywhere. A thrush was singing on the black branches of a withered tree ; but Dorothy was not there.

He started running again, a chilling fear creeping through his blood that she had turned long ago and gone back to Eckington. His eagerness redoubled then.

"She couldn't have gone back in the time," he muttered breathlessly to himself as he ran. "She couldn't."

But it did not occur to him that she might have turned off from the road into the fields behind the hedges. He had seen her keeping to the road. He kept to the road himself. When, therefore, in the distance, Dorothy heard the sound of hurrying feet, she stood still in the long grass of a hay field and, through the dense network of the brambles, watched him running by.

During all the time whilst those hurrying feet were approaching, she could not see who it was. Doubtless the hope was with her that it might be he. In those first moments of trembling expectation, her heart was beating but very faintly, her lips were hot and dry. But when at last he came abreast of where she stood concealed and, through the thick lattice of the branches, she saw Dicky's face, a laugh of joy sprang into her

eyes. So suddenly her heart leapt in realisation that she pressed her hand to her breast.

His cap was off. He held it in his hand. His hair was blowing back from his forehead; his cheeks were red and she could see the glitter in his eye. Nature then may indeed have triumphed in her soul, but in her heart she only felt a cry of thankfulness to know he loved her still.

Near by where she stood, a sheep hurdle had been driven into the bank to guard the broken line of hedge. To that she ran, looking over into the road and calling his name before he turned the next corner out of sight. At the sound of her voice, Dicky stopped on the moment. He looked back. When he saw her leaning over the sheep hurdle, he began slowly to return.

Circumstances, he felt, were against him now. He had never really meant that they should meet. Yet it was impossible to deny to himself that he was glad of it. The sudden exaltation of spirit which he felt, allowed him no ignorance of his delight. It had seemed that for all these days gone by, he had been like a vessel battling against God's anger in the sea. It had all been as it was that night when he had crossed the water to attend his mother's burial. Now at the near sight of Dorothy, all the buffeting of circumstance was at an end. For the brief moment, he cared nothing but that she was there, her hand stretched out to take his as they met.

"Dorothy!" he whispered.

"Dicky!" she replied.

He held her hand very tightly in his own.

"I've been so miserable," said he. It was what he had sworn to himself that he would never tell her. The moment it was said, he remembered, then let the memory go.

"So have I," she whispered back; "frightfully miserable. I thought we were never going to see each other again."

"All these nights," said Dicky, "I've hardly slept at all."

"Neither have I," said she.

They were both so eager to let each other know their suffering that neither of them told the truth. Half an hour may have passed each night after Dicky had laid his head on the pillow—a wretched half hour in which he had magnified all the misery of life—but after that his eyes had closed, and he had fallen into healthy sleep. It had been much as this with Dorothy. But, indeed, in their hours of consciousness they had suffered bitterly and both were eager to tell it all in proof of the greatness of their love.

"Why did you walk away that day by the river?" asked Dicky.

"Why didn't you come after me? I waited for a whole hour by the stile."

"I never knew you were waiting," said he. "I went up to that wood on the hill and stayed there nearly all night. There was a fearful row. They were out looking

for me. I didn't care. I didn't care what happened then."

She looked at him in wonder, even in admiration, to think he had suffered so much and all because of her.

"Oh—Dicky, supposing you'd caught your death of cold," she whispered.

"I shouldn't have been sorry then if I had," said he. For what is the death of the body to the lover when his love is dead? That night, indeed, he would have welcomed death.

"But if you'd died, Dicky," she went on with that greater logic which a woman always has in matters such as these which are her kingdom. "If you'd died, Dicky, what would have become of your painting? You'd never have gone to London then; you'd never have learnt; you'd never have painted the great picture which every one'll want to buy."

He dropped her hands and put his own upon her shoulders, looking deeply, intently, questioningly into her eyes.

"Do you want me to paint a great picture?" he asked.

She nodded her head, raising her eyes again to his.

"But you begged me not to go away—you said I could just as well stay on here at the mill and paint, and that when we were married we could hang them up on the walls."

She nodded her head again.

"I know—I know. I did say that. I thought it

then. But I don't think it now. I'm sure you ought to go to London. Nothing you could ever say would make me stand in your way now. I know you love your painting first——"

"I love you," said he quickly. "I've found out in the last few days how terribly much I do."

She pressed a gently detaining hand against his shoulder. The sense of mastery was coming to her now. Even in the first moments of her renunciation, she could see the power it gave into her hand. In his eyes already were the thousand protestations she so longed to hear. Surely—surely he could never forget or cease to love her now. But until she had said all, she would not let one of those protestations pass his lips.

"You love your painting best," she repeated. "You told me that when you didn't answer my question that night by the river. I do believe you care for me, too, but in a secondary way. It's the way men care. I shall never hope that you will love me best."

In silence Dicky listened, in silence and amazement, unable to follow this sudden changing of her mind. It was not that he tried to understand it. The fullness of his mind was given in admiration of the nobility of her unselfishness. He found her more wonderful than when that night on the bridge at Eckington he had looked for long into her eyes before she had questioned why he did not kiss her. With the one great exception in his slender experience he knew of a surety that all women were pure. He had not known till now how

greatly they were possessed of understanding. She asked nothing and was ready to give all. In the sudden sense of freedom which it brought, he felt eager to bind himself anew with the chains which he had severed.

"I couldn't love you more than I do," he replied fervently. "I want to go away to London, I know. I must go away. I shall never learn anything if I don't, and I'm just eighteen now. Fancy, in less than two years I shall be twenty—more than half my life gone—but, oh, you dear thing, I don't want to go. I care for you so fearfully now. You do understand, and I thought you didn't. If we could only be married before I went. If we could only go away together."

It came in a moment to both of them then the thought of their journey to London, of their life together from that day onwards. The mere contemplation of themselves as man and wife, knit so closely, the one to the other, presented at the same moment to their minds so near an embrace as that no man could put them asunder.

Dicky's eyes dwelt strangely on her face and then, with a little cry to his heart, she was in his arms.

"My dearest," he whispered, "couldn't we? Couldn't we? It'd all be so simple then. Think of it—all day—every day together."

He thought of the nights when he would no longer be alone—those nights when it seemed that a wretchedness of mind had kept him awake until morning. But he could not trust himself to speak of them. His lips

were so close to hers. There was, moreover, no need that he should. Such thoughts were whirling through her mind as well. She felt as though she had fallen into the depths of a rapid river. The water washed about her face. It seemed as if in another moment she would be submerged; as if, when he pressed his lips to hers, she would know nothing more.

"Dicky," she whispered.

He leant still closer to her, but did not kiss her then. There came the sound of a tapping stick and heavy footsteps along the road. She disengaged herself quickly from his arms to stand a pace away.

It was the shepherd, Mr. Angel, coming back from his sheep on the hill. Lassie, the sheep dog, trotted by his side.

"Marnin', Master Dicky—marnin', Miss Dorothy," said he as his steps grew slower till he stopped. "It be a fine marnin' outside of a church, though Mrs. Angel, she goes these days as well as wet 'uns."

"Do you never go, Mr. Angel?" asked Dicky, and thought how dull he was not to see that they would sooner be alone.

"Oh—I goes wet days, look you—it be sommat to do on a wet Sunday, hearing parson read out his sermons. I understand 'em fair well enough sometimes, and what I doesn't understand, Mrs. Angel's got a great gift wi' explaining. I said one day to 'ur, 'Mrs. Angel,' I says, 'twould not be out of the ways if you got up wi' a surplus yerself and preached a surmon.

You'd do it well-nigh as good as parson himself.' I says that, and she's never forgotten it, look you. Well—well——" he tapped his stick three times on the road as he thought of more that he could say. When nothing rose to his mind, he called to Lassie and walked on.

But the spell of it was broken now. The magic of such moments as those is as brittle as the finest glass. Mr. Angel had broken it into a thousand pieces. Dorothy spoke of going home. An unreasonable fear had come into her mind. Life seemed too strong, the current too swift.

"We'll come home, Dicky," she begged.

"Oh—why?" he asked in bitter disappointment.

She shook her head.

"I—I don't feel very well," she replied.

In all concern he took her homewards.

CHAPTER XV

MR. HOLLON and Anne walked back from the church alone. Mr. Furlong's strongest principle was never to do business on Sunday, but he had stayed behind in Eckington to chat affably with a farmer about indifferent matters. It made an agreeable relation between them in view of the fact that the farmer was going to do business with him the next day.

"I shan't be long after you," said he. "This man, Lipscombe," he added in a quieter tone to Hollon, "he was sitting three pews in front of you—generally goes to Little Cumberton—I don't know why he came here to-day, except that he's always been saying that he would do business with me. I expect that's what he's here for. Of course, I conduct no business on Sundays, never have and never shall. But I should just like to stop a minute and ask him what he thought of our sermon. You walk on with Anne."

Mr. Hollon, only too glad of the opportunity, had willingly led her away from those little groups of people who congregate outside the church when the service in the country is over.

"Do you see that woman over there," whispered

Anne as they moved off, "the one in black with the boy about Dicky's age?"

"Yes."

"That's Mrs. Leggatt."

"Dorothy's mother?"

"Yes."

"Why—of course—she's the woman who——" he stopped suddenly and a colour crept into Anne's cheeks. He remembered now the story which Mr. Furlong had told him when last he had stayed at the mill. This was the woman whose folly had been found out, whose folly had been forgiven. Until that moment he had never connected her in his mind with the Dorothy with whom Dicky was in love. As they passed her, Mr. Hollom closely watched her face. There was the same simplicity of expression there as he had seen with Dorothy. In Mrs. Leggatt's face it was tired; it had saddened. There was no joyousness left in it. He could imagine how, under the bitter rod of forgiveness, she had bowed her head and suffered. But this was not the only resemblance which Dorothy bore to her mother. There was the same attractive fullness of the lips, suggesting no coarseness of temperament, but an instability of emotion, a capacity for being carried away, as she no doubt had been overwhelmed by the passion of a sudden moment.

"Good morning, Anne," she said as they passed.

It was the same gentle note of voice, too, holding that soft quality of submissiveness as he had heard in Dorothy's only two hours before.

"Good morning," replied Anne brightly. "We saw Dorothy on our way to church."

"Yes—she asked if she could go out for a walk this morning instead. I don't really blame her. But the poor child said she had a headache. I expect you'll meet her coming back. We have dinner at one."

They passed through their gate into the school-house garden and, for some moments, Anne and Mr. Hollom walked on without speaking. His question regarding Mrs. Leggatt had set moving a train of thought in both their minds: a train of thought which, allowing for the experience of life in one and the complete innocence of life in the other, were not so very dissimilar. How far, thought Mr. Hollom, is this girl Dorothy like her mother? Anne was wondering if Dicky possessed those same instincts which once Christina had explained in men to her.

"Be true to yourself, Anne," Christina had said; "then men will be true to you."

It was practically all she had said, but it had conveyed a thousand things to Anne's mind, as indeed she had meant it should.

"Anne," said Mr. Hollom at last, "do you think Dicky will ever go to London?"

The question was so abrupt, it seemed to be so closely related to the very thoughts which even then were passing through her mind that, for the moment, she was confused. She could not answer. He glanced down at her face. There was that little set, determined

look about her lips, which he never, in the blindness of his affection, connected with her father.

"Do you?" he asked again presently when she had not answered.

She looked straight in front of her.

"Why shouldn't he?" she inquired. "Do you mean if father came to know, he'd stop him?"

"No—I don't mean that. Perhaps I should have said, do you think Dicky will ever want to go to London?"

A frown puckered her forehead. No woman likes to be forced to admit her knowledge of life. It is her preference to be told what she knows already.

"Why shouldn't he?" she asked.

"Perhaps because Dorothy won't let him," he replied. "if you were in love with some one, would you let him go out into the world, risk his growing tired of you, risk his meeting other women, risk his becoming some different sort of creature altogether—because life, you know, has an unhappy knack of knocking one into funny shapes—would you risk all that just in order that the man you loved might make a name for himself, when by staying at home he could have been comfortable and happy for the rest of his days—with you?"

"It is only in moments," Mr. Hollom had once said to Dicky, and with more truth than he probably realised, "it is only in moments that things are everlasting." It is only in moments that great realisations

in life are attained. In that moment that Sunday morning, on the road from Eckington to Bredon, Anne became conscious for the first time that life was not a mere matter of obedience or disobedience, but a complex puzzle, a tangled skein, needing such unravelling as only patience and suffering from some one or another could possibly accomplish.

Until Mr. Hollom had put that question to her, she had believed existence to be a very simple matter, entailing obedience to the voice of command. The voice might be love, it might be duty. It had never seemed possible to her that both might command at once.

Mr. Hollom watched her face with a gentle amusement and interest.

"The irresistible force," said he smiling, "and the immovable object. What would you do?"

"I should have no right to stand in anybody's way," she said at last.

"No," he agreed, "you wouldn't; though on the other hand you'd have every right to protect and secure the interests of your own affections. Love means a great deal to a woman. It means a home, it means happiness, it means her children; it means what eighty-five per cent. of women are agreed to call their lives—love is all that to a woman. The first law of life is self-preservation. Can you talk of standing in anybody's way when the preservation of your own life is at stake? Do you think Dorothy will ever let him go?"

"How can she stop him?" asked Anne. "I can't imagine anybody being able to stop Dicky if he's once made up his mind. I don't think he's cruel at heart; but I've often known him to be cruel, when he wanted to get his own way. If he's made up his mind to go, he'll go."

"I hope you're right," said Mr. Hollom slowly. "Dicky's not ordinary. I believe there's a future for him as great as any painter that has ever lived in this country. I don't care who it is. I believe he's got something in him as great as a man can be. But he's got his nature to deal with first and, great as his chances are, they all lie in the palm of a girl's hand. She doesn't even know the scales she's balancing. It may sound silly to talk in this exaggerated way. Dicky may go to London, he may paint mediocre pictures all his life. I'm no prophet. I only believe."

For some way the tapping of Anne's heels on the hard road kept time in the silence with his. Her mind was in confusion. She had never thought of Dicky as with a great future in front of him before. She scarcely believed it possible even now. Dicky, who had been fond of painting little pictures which had never really pleased her because they were never really like the places they represented? How could he ever make money by them? Who would buy them? Greatness itself, as a quality alone, did not reach her mind at all. Yet at the same time, if it were possible for him to make a livelihood by his painting, there

seemed something finer in that than working on at the mill. So in a sense she appreciated Dorothy's point of view. But why, after all, should he go away? A home was better than anything else in the world. She tried to see it in the spirit of romance, but the effort failed.

Romance is the power to see in colour, in brilliant colour, too. When Anne regarded Dicky's adventure to London, every prospect was grey. At 'Trafford Mill, happy with Dorothy, where she, too, would always see him, the colour she saw was rose.

"I think," she said at last, "I think I can quite understand why Dorothy wants to keep him. I don't think I should myself."

"Why not?"

"Because it doesn't seem right to stand in any one's way. Dicky may be able to sell pictures one day——"

"My dear Anne," he interrupted, "it isn't a question of selling pictures. Dicky doesn't really care whether he sells pictures or not——"

"Then what's the sense," she broke in, "in letting him go? He must make his living."

"Oh, yes—he may be able to do that all right. A meagre living—hand to mouth, his hand most likely more often in an empty pocket; his mouth empty, too. But I've no doubt he'll be able to scrape along. No one could deny that he's got ability above the average, enough to make him keep the wolf from the door. No—the point is, will he be a great artist? If he will be, he'll make

money—more than he ever could at the mill—whether he likes to or not. Put the money out of your head altogether. Assume, at least, that he can live. Is he going to be great, or is this girl going to throw her arms across the way to his greatness? I only know this, that if he doesn't go I shall be miserably disappointed. Obviously, at any rate, they've fallen out. One can see that from his manner."

"Well, then, they've made it up now," said Anne; "Dorothy didn't go along this way for nothing."

"Yes—but that doesn't mean they've made it up."

Anne looked up quickly into his face.

"I believe you hope," said she, "that they won't."

"I believe I do," he replied.

CHAPTER XVI

DOROTHY walked back to Eckington by an upper road. She wished, she said, to go alone.

"But, Dorrie," he pleaded, "if you don't feel well?"

"Oh, I don't feel really bad—and—and I want to think."

"But this afternoon—we can meet this afternoon?"

"Won't to-morrow do instead?"

"Oh, I couldn't wait till to-morrow."

"It's only a few hours, Dicky."

"Yes, but I couldn't. Do come this afternoon. Be at the oak tree at half-past two."

"Three."

"Well—a quarter to."

"I'll try," she whispered.

He watched her going until the last sway of her skirt swung out of sight. How could he go away? Yet in two days he knew in the heart of him he would be gone. What would she say when she knew?

If there had been hope of his marrying Dorothy after the waiting of a year or so, he knew that it would be very different then and, as he sat on the arms of the lock gates, wildly the thought came to him that it

might be so. His father had married when he was a very young man. In less than two years he himself would be twenty. The more he considered it the greater grew the probability of it in his mind. Some different aspect of their relationship had come to him in those moments before Mr. Angel had appeared upon the scene. A step had been taken then in their development which could not be retraced. He was not fully aware of the direction in which that step had led him. But now the need of their marriage consumed his whole point of view. If he could marry her, he would stay. He would not go to London. He would give up everything. So, as he sat there on the lock gates, he reviewed their chances, one moment buoyed up with hope, the next cast down in deep despair.

Slowly and incessantly the water trickled through the closed lock gates. The sound of it purred in his ears, a gentle accompaniment to the roaring of the water over the weir. That sense of the Sabbath was over everything. The mill wheel was still ; the sparrows perched on its arms were pecking at the drying slime they had collected. The rich scent of almonds came from the may trees. The creeping wall plants filling the niches of the empty lock were burst in bloom. It was still the day of summer dropped in the lap of spring.

But to Dicky, as he struggled between the needs of soul and body, these things were meaningless and had no voice to tempt him from his thoughts. When Mr. Hollom and Anne returned, they found him still seated

on the arm of the lock gates, his legs curled up on the great black beam, his head in his hands staring down into the water.

They had looked for him first in the house; then saw him across the other side of the weir as they came out again into the garden.

"They haven't made it up," Mr. Hollom declared on the first moment as he saw him. Anne felt a twinge of pain in her heart as she heard the note of relief in his voice. She knew then that she wanted them to make it up; that she did not want Dicky to go away at all.

"Where's the pater?" was Dicky's first question.

"He stayed behind," said Mr. Hollom, "to speak to a farmer—Mr. Lipscombe—why?"

"Oh, nothing," replied Dicky; "I only wondered where he was."

At the mid-day meal his attention to his father was conspicuous, but conspicuous only to Anne. Mr. Hollom was a stranger; he would not have noticed it. Mr. Furlong always, and quite rightly, expected attention from his children. He had often said that it was due from youth to age. When, therefore, he received it, it did not particularly arrest his attention. He said "thank you," and smiled at him when Dicky went out of his way to pass him the salt and pepper. He made a jest about the thickness of the bread which Dicky had cut for him; but beyond this and the slight rising of his spirits, he did not show that he was aware

of any difference in Dicky's manner. Mr. Furlong's spirits were high, in any case. Lipscombe the farmer had chatted to him in a most affable frame of mind. He had even mentioned business, but Mr. Furlong had held up his hand.

"Let's leave it till to-morrow," he had said. "I put business as far from me as possible on Sundays. It won't hurt waiting."

As this had somewhat conveyed to Mr. Lipscombe that he was not so terribly anxious to do business, it had served a double purpose. In his own mind Mr. Furlong felt it had been a just reward for the observance of his principles. When, therefore, after dinner Dicky asked him if they could have a talk together, he looked his surprise, no doubt, but turning it to a smile, he took Dicky's arm and led him out into the garden.

It was with no little curiosity that he waited to hear what Dicky had to say, for this was the first time in all his experience of his son that he had ever taken him into his confidence. Despite all his maintaining that there should be mutual confidence between children and parents, he felt an unexpected thrill of pride at the thought that he was about to hear his secret thoughts from Dicky's own lips. He tightened his hand on Dicky's arm ; he looked back over his shoulder to see if Anne had noticed.

But Dicky did not find it so easy as he had supposed. They passed through the open wicket gate ;

they walked down the hill beneath the flowering apple trees, across the weir to the towing path on the other side of the river, and still he said nothing.

"Well, old chap," said his father at last, "what is it you've got to say?"

With increasing nervousness, Dicky drew his arm away. The certainty of justice in the request he was going to make had grievously diminished in his mind. While still in the heat of his passion that morning, he had known it to be the only true solution to the almost insurmountable difficulty which Nature had thrown so suddenly in his way. But now, in the cold and dispassionate presence of his father, it seemed to have lost the greater weight of its importance. Yet he knew that if it were to be said at all, if it were to be said, moreover, in complete justice to himself, it must be said at once, directly, firmly, with no beating about the bush. He drew a breath and fixed his eyes steadily before him.

"Would it be possible," he began uncertainly, "I mean, is there any reason why I shouldn't be married in a year or two?"

He had never intended to suggest that it should be so long as two years, but so cold was the blood running in him now, that it seemed a year would sound ridiculous to his father's ears. Anyhow, it was said, the words were irrevocably spoken. In the silence that followed them, Dicky heard the reverberating echoes as though a thousand voices were crying them back with ironical

insistence. He dared not look at his father. Even with his eyes set directly in front of him, he could see nothing. The black line of the towing path, losing itself in the long grass at either side, the belt of trees upon the other bank hanging upon the river's edge, the far line of Bredon Hill rising and falling in the brilliant sky, all these things were confused in a shapeless mist before his eyes.

"Married?" said Mr. Furlong at last. He said it in all kindness, meaning most earnestly that now, when his son had come to him of his own accord, he would give every consideration, make every allowance for a nature which possibly he did not too thoroughly understand. The note, therefore, which Dicky had heard in his voice was not that of defiance; but it was the note of despondency, of disappointment. For at the outset Mr. Furlong knew that this was beyond his comprehension. He was not conscious of that knowledge. What came most prominently to his mind was the feeling that Dicky could not be serious, or if he were, then that he did not really know what he was talking about. Still, he held his judgment back until he had heard more. With a conscious effort, he forced the note of kindness on the word; yet to one as sensitive as Dicky, he had not struck it true.

"Married?" he repeated. "Well—tell me, old chap—what do you mean?"

Dicky faltered. He knew he had come to a door that would never open to all his knocking. It was im-

possible to explain what he had felt while he was in Dorothy's arms that morning. Indeed he scarcely knew the full meaning of it himself. All women were pure. He had said that over and over again. All women like Dorothy were pure. He had heard of others when he was at school. He had known of one in his own experience. But all women like Dorothy were pure. Therefore, he did not know what he meant, or what he had felt, except that marriage would save him from some terrible catastrophe. Yet to make it clear to his father, this must be explained, and unless it were understood of him without the necessity of words, he knew that he could never explain it himself.

The modesty of a boy with such a training as Dicky is a frail and fragile thing, as brittle as the brittlest glass. Even to the gentle understanding of a woman, he is stilted and ill-at-ease. Before one of his own sex he is dumb. When, therefore, Mr. Furlong asked him what he meant, he faltered with a word, only to resume his silence.

"Well, who is it?" his father inquired presently.

"Dorothy."

"Dorothy Leggatt?"

"Yes."

Mr. Furlong smiled beneath his moustache. Of course, it was a boy and girl love affair; not serious in any way, but very amusing, even interesting. He smiled, partly because it called back to his memory an incident in his own life when he was younger even than

Dicky. He recalled her name. It was Elsie. She had light hair and was two years older than he. He smiled because he thought of what she would be like now. The phrase, fair, fat, and forty crossed his mind. He remembered kissing her at a party; writing her letters from school. But he had never wished to marry her. The question of the possibility of marriage had never entered their heads. There came a time when all was over between them. He had shown the photograph she had given him to a companion. Her dignity was hurt to think that others should know how she had bestowed her affection upon a boy two years younger than herself. And all this was very amusing as it came back in snatches like a long-forgotten tune. Dicky's little love affair no doubt had the same amusing incidents; but he was taking it in all seriousness. Mr. Furlong knew that he must take it seriously, too. But marry within a year or two!

"Well, I'm sure she's a very nice girl," he said presently. "I'm very glad to hear that you're fond of her. I've no doubt it'll steady you a good deal, and I hope it'll last. How long have you known your own mind about it?"

"Since last autumn."

Dicky had not seen his father's smile, but he could read all that was in his mind from those first few opening sentences. Before ever judgment had been given, the spirit of combat had already begun to rise in him. His mind was preparing for the inevitable

clash of their natures. He had a far clearer foresight than his father for the danger which lay ahead.

"That's quite a long time, isn't it?" said Mr. Furlong. He was indeed surprised himself, having imagined that he would hear it was but a few weeks.

Dicky drew a long breath. His cheeks felt hot, that had been as cold as ice.

"And what do you propose to marry on?" Mr. Furlong asked him then and, with the kindest expression in his eyes, he looked into the face of his son.

Dicky's cheeks grew hotter still. It was the gentleness of voice, the kindness of expression accompanying those particular words which rasped against his mind. His father knew that on this point he was disarmed. He had nothing to marry on, nothing but Mr. Furlong's bounty, rewarding him, perhaps out of proportion for a time, for his work in the mill.

"Well, you know I've nothing," said he at last. "Unless you pay me as you pay Will'um for his work in the mill. I work in the mill, too."

"And what do you think your work is worth?"

There was not the faintest thought of cruelty in his mind as he put these questions. In his own reckoning it would have been cruel to deny Dicky a hearing from the first moment he had spoken; but by these measures which he was adopting, he was showing gently to his son the simple folly of his request. Yet to Dicky,

knowing the ultimate issue, assured already in his mind of what his father thought, this cross-examination was the refinement of torture. For some moments he could not trust himself to reply.

"What do you think it's worth?" repeated Mr. Furlong.

"I don't know," said Dicky slowly.

"Well, what do you think you'd require to live on if you were married?"

"We could live on a pound a week," said Dicky. "I don't mean that we could be married now—at once—but in about a year's time or so—I should be just twenty—we could live on a pound a week then."

"Where? Where could you live on a pound a week?"

"Well—if—if we had those two rooms you're not using upstairs in the house—we could pay you ten shillings or even more for our food, and—and if you gave me a small wedding present, I'm sure Mr. Leggatt would give Dorothy a present, too, then we could furnish the rooms—and—and——"

That was all. He had never thought how it could be done until that moment. In that moment invention had come swiftly to his aid. It was all very simple. What could possibly be said against it? Those two rooms were never used. With ten pounds—with less, they could be furnished. They would be transcendently happy in those two little rooms. In one of them, which could be their sitting-room, they would

often entertain Anne. He would paint pictures, after all, to hang upon their walls. It was suddenly now becoming so real that he did not even feel the pang of regret at the thought that he would never do better with his painting than that. In the prospect that his invention had raised, hope lifted again in his heart. He really thought that on those lines the thing were feasible enough. Then he looked up into his father's face and all hope withered within him.

Neither of them saw the humour of it; the pathetic comedy of a son paying his father ten shillings a week for two attic rooms in that father's house, of taking there to his heart a girl bride and living with her there like two mice beneath the rafters.

Yet it was a scheme, a scheme to save him from the coarser measures and lessons of life, a scheme which many a father might adopt rather than that his son should seek the harsh teachings of the world in the learning of his manhood. But neither humorously nor seriously did the suggestion appeal to Mr. Furlong's mind. It had just enough of rationality in it to make him realise that his position of kindly disagreement was not so unassailable as he had imagined. It was this very discovery which had so often annoyed him in his discussions with Dicky before. He felt annoyance now.

"Do you realise," he said at length, "that you're only a boy—a boy of seventeen or eighteen—which is it?"

"Just eighteen," said Dicky.

"Well, just eighteen. When I was that age I hadn't dreamt of marriage."

"No, you didn't perhaps, but I have."

"Yes, but, my dear boy, you're not old enough to know your own mind. When you go out into the world, it's quite possible that your mind'll change. You think Dorothy Leggatt lovely and all that sort of thing now, and I've no doubt she is a charming girl, and I'm very glad, as I said, that you're fond of her; but when you get out into the world, it's quite possible that all that may change."

"How can I get out into the world if I have to stay on here in the mill?" asked Dicky. "Supposing all that's true what you say—and that I should change—I've got to stay on here working at the mill. I never shall get out into the world; I never shall see anybody else to make me change my mind."

"Well, when I say out into the world, I'm speaking figuratively. I mean when you get experience."

"But I've said I don't ask that we should be married at once. We'll wait a year. If I care for her still by then, shan't I know my own mind?"

"My dear boy," Mr. Furlong tried to smile, he forced a kindly expression into his eyes; "no man really knows his own mind till he's nearly thirty."

"Do you mean I oughtn't to marry till then?"

"Well, not quite so long as that, perhaps."

"But you married soon after you were twenty-one."

"Who told you that?"

"Well, you're forty-four now, aren't you?"

"How do you know I'm forty-four?"

"I know you are—Anne's twenty—nearly twenty-one. You must be something like that."

The expression which Dicky knew so well then settled on his father's lips. It meant that he had passed a certain limit of endurance and would listen to reason no more.

"I didn't come out here to discuss my age," said he.

"No, I know," replied Dicky; "I haven't meant to discuss it. But if I'm not to be married till I'm nearly thirty, what am I to do. I can't help what I feel."

The expression of obstinacy swept from Mr. Furlong's eyes. In place of it there came a look, half of horror, half disgust.

"What you feel? What do you mean?" he demanded.

"I mean I feel that if I stay on here with—with her—we—we ought to be married."

"I've never heard of anything so abominable in all my life!" exclaimed Mr. Furlong. "Have you so little control over yourself as all that? Is that all you desire to marry for? Go back to the house and never let me hear you talk of anything like this again. I never thought a son of mine would harbour such abominable thoughts in his mind. Go back to the house—I don't want to talk to you about this any more."

Dicky turned on his heel, and Mr. Furlong sat down on a stile that led into the meadows. He never looked in Dicky's direction again; but as his mind wandered back into the past, he remembered the sight of Christina as she sometimes sat at dinner in the great dining-room at Wittingham. He remembered the sight of her graceful shoulders and the thoughts which had passed across his mind then. He recalled the struggle through which he had suffered when he had known that to marry her would mean the sacrifice of his father's support in his old age. He remembered how he had given in; how the flesh had overcome the spirit.

These memories irritated him. He rose with annoyance to his feet.

"But my goodness!" he exclaimed aloud, "I was what? I was twenty then! This boy's only eighteen!"

CHAPTER XVII

As Dicky walked through the fields to keep his meeting with Dorothy in the oak tree, a wild flood of incoherent ideas was racing through his mind. Bitterly he accused his father of all those vices which the want of understanding seems to prove. He was brutal; he was cruel. There was a trait of hypocrisy in him which Dicky had never seen before. How dare he speak of such things as abominable when he himself had married! What right had he to decree that any boy should wait until he was thirty before he took a wife?

These things he said aloud as he walked. In the heat of the injustice which he felt he was suffering, he could see no other aspect of the case than his own. The misunderstanding which Mr. Furlong had shown seemed only intentional to him. There was only one way in which he could meet it. That way, without hesitation, he determined then to take. Mr. Hollom had told him that on Monday he would have the ten pounds ready for him. On Tuesday morning, therefore, he would go; on Tuesday morning when the day was early and no one was astir in the mill.

"I won't stay! I won't stay!" he kept muttering to

himself, and, in his haste to reach Dorothy, he stumbled over a tree trunk, swearing loudly as he recovered himself from falling.

"I'm changing," he said aloud, "I'm becoming a different person. I don't care what I become—I'll get away."

Dorothy was there already. His talk with his father had made him late. He flung himself into the explanation of everything at once. The difficulty of telling Dorothy that he was going away so soon had become quite easy now. The words tumbled over each other as he informed her of all that had happened in the last few hours.

"So I shall go," he concluded; "I shall go on Tuesday from Pershore. I shall go early in the morning before anybody's up. He'll never see me in that house again. I hate it now. I've hated it really ever since the mater died. It's never been the same without her."

Dorothy's lips were trembling as she heard him. The tears were filling in her eyes. She knew how, even if she had wished it, she had no power to hold him then. He was going right away from her, and he was going in two days. She hid her face on his shoulder. The tears tumbled down upon his coat.

"You said not till June, Dicky," she faltered. "I marked it up on the calendar in my bedroom. It looked terribly short even then—just five weeks—and now—it's only two days."

He patted her shoulder gently. He knew he was a man now, now that he was taking alone the responsibility of life.

"The sooner I go," he whispered, "the sooner I shall be making enough for us both. If I have to wait till I'm thirty, what is the good of staying on at the mill? I'd never have gone at all, if he'd have let me marry in a year or two. I'd have chucked it all up for you. But you do believe, don't you, that I'm going to succeed? I know the things I do now are not a bit of good. But I've got it in me. Mr. Hollom thinks I have. He believes that I am going to succeed. He'd never have given me that frightful lot of money if he didn't think so. You do believe, don't you—little child—little child?"

He stood there with Dorothy crying on his shoulder, and he felt so much a man.

She looked up at him with wet cheeks.

"I do believe," she whispered. And then he pressed her wildly to him. No words a woman can say to a man sound really more wonderful than these. Love he expects—love he means to win; but when she says that she believes in him, it is such tribute as no cries of praise from all the world can equal.

As he heard her say it, his heart swelled once more with the strength and virtue of those hundred men. He felt that the whole world was for his conquering. Within himself, he made a fervent oath she should not believe in vain.

"But why did he say it was abominable?" asked Dorothy presently as she dried her eyes.

"Because of what I said."

"But what did you say?"

He hesitated. The heat of his anger was passing from him now. A few moments before he could have told her without faltering.

"I said——" he began. "Well—you know this morning—just before old Angel came up——" he put his arms about her and hid her face again upon his shoulder. "Oh, my darling!" he whispered, "I do care for you so much. I said—oh, you know what I mean—I said that if I stayed on here, still seeing you, we ought to be married—because—oh, I know you'll understand—because of what I—I felt." He pressed her face still closer upon his shoulder. "Dorrie, you know I love you, don't you?"

And then he waited—waited to know if he had deserved rebuke. She kept her head close against his shoulder, but said nothing. She was thinking of her mother; of her mother and Mr. Allen. In that sudden moment she knew, too, why she had never loved her father.

"You don't think it's abominable, do you?" Dicky whispered across her thoughts.

For an instant she raised her eyes and he looked into them.

"My little wife," he said hoarsely, and pressed his lips to hers.

All that afternoon they sat there in the oak tree. On the threshold of that house of love there are a thousand things to say. They talked until the sun began to slant down to the West.

"And where can we meet to-morrow?" he begged of her when she made ready to go.

"Nowhere to-morrow," she replied disconsolately. "I've got to drive into Pershore with mother. We shall be there all day."

"But I must see you again," he exclaimed. "I must see you to-morrow, because I shall be going early on Tuesday morning. Dorrie, I must see you. I—we couldn't say good-bye now. Come out to-morrow evening."

"How could I? They wouldn't let me. Father's fearfully strict."

"But you could when they've gone to bed—they wouldn't know then. Dorrie! We couldn't say good-bye here."

"No—but how could I—when they've gone to bed?"

"You could get out by the back door."

"When they're asleep?"

"Yes."

He said it so easily, so readily, that it seemed not so impossible after all. There was no reason why they should find out. And could she bear to let him go now, not to see him again for perhaps a year, or even more? She knew that was impossible. She was

clinging to him then as they stood on the hillside beneath the oak tree. It would be beyond her endurance if, when they reached the mill, they were just to shake hands and say good-bye upon the road.

“Very well,” she said at last, “I’ll come—I’ll try. They go to bed at half-past ten. I expect in an hour from that they’ll be asleep. My bedroom’s over the kitchen, they won’t hear me getting up. I’ll try, Dicky. Be on the bridge at half-past eleven. I’ll try and be there then.”

CHAPTER XVIII

For the rest of that evening and all the next day no word passed between Dicky and his father. No doubt it was this smarting under the sense of injustice which made his going the easier. Had he realised the bitter wound which would be inflicted on his father's heart by his departure, Dicky might have hesitated ; with the need of Dorothy he might almost have stayed even then. But in his ignorance of the blow about to fall on him, Mr. Furlong seriously imagined that his silence expressed in him the spirit of authority.

"I shall not speak to him again," he told himself, "until he first approaches me in a contrite manner."

So the Monday came and went. Dicky worked in the mill as though nothing were about to happen. At meals, Anne and Mr. Hollom watched the set line of his lips, observed every little expression by which they might see if there were the signs of any deviation from his purpose. There was yet hope in Anne that his courage might fail him at the last ; for the same reason there was yet fear in Mr. Hollom. But they saw none. Doggedly and in silence he went through that day. Early in the evening he rose from his chair in the sitting-room, declaring that he was going to bed.

Bending over Anne, he kissed her lingeringly, lovingly.

" Dicky," said his father, " is there any necessity to kiss your sister like that ? "

" Like what ? " said Dicky sharply.

Anne's cheeks were scarlet.

" I see no reason for you to hang over her like that. I don't think it's nice."

They looked at each other, and for that moment there was battle in their eyes. Dicky knew quite well why his father had drawn attention to it. In the light of what he had told him the day before, it was a cruel thing to have said. He could not see how the unhappy man, against overwhelming odds, was struggling for the power of his authority. The possession of authority over his children meant to him the possession of their respect; if he secured their obedience, he believed he secured their love. Now that he knew there was antagonism between himself and Dicky, he sought for any excuse to command in order that he might see himself obeyed.

So he met Dicky's eyes with a stern and unrelenting gaze, little realising that this was the last look which would pass between them for many and many a day.

From that gaze Dicky turned with contempt in his heart to Mr. Hollom. They shook hands. As he was about to leave the room Mr. Furlong called him back.

" You haven't said good-night to me," he said.

Dicky held out his hand.

"Good-night," he replied.

"Good-night," said Mr. Furlong and, in his voice, he tried to convey the sense of power. The note of it to Dicky was but that of anger. For the last time he endeavoured to quell the spirit in his son with the expression in his eyes; but Dicky would not look at him. When his hand was free, he turned and left the room.

In half an hour, Anne was knocking timidly at his door. A distant voice bid her come in. When she entered, she found Dicky leaning out of the window, his face in his hands. Over the willows beyond the weir, a pale yellow moon was rising out into the wide space of heaven. Gently she closed the door and crossed the room to his side.

"Dicky," she whispered, "are you really going?"

"Yes," he replied.

She sat down by the window at his side.

"You'll write, won't you?"

"If you don't let the pater know where I am."

"I promise I won't. And you'll let me know if there's ever anything you want? You won't starve, will you? If you can't make any money, you'll come back?"

"People don't starve," said Dicky, and proved his ignorance of the world.

"And—Dicky——"

"What?"

"I want you to take this." She held out a little

packet that jingled as it passed from her hands to his.

"Anne!" he exclaimed in wonder.

"There's only two pounds," she whispered. "I'd give you much, much more if I had it."

"Anne!" He threw his arms round her neck. A thousand things were drawn into his memory by that generous gift—the times she had emptied the contents of her money-box to buy him a sketch-book in Pershore, the numberless times her generosity had saved him from difficulty. "I can't take it," he said, and it lay in the palm of his hand and he looked at it.

"Do!" she begged. "You're sure to want it. Ten pounds will never be enough."

"But it's all your savings for ever so long."

"That doesn't matter—I don't want it. It's no good to me."

"But you could buy things with it," he protested. He could not persuade himself that money could be useless to any one—even to a girl. And all the time it lay there temptingly in the palm of his hand.

"I'm as good as buying things now," said she, "when I give it to you. Please—please take it!"

She made him accept it at last; for when a woman offers, she means in her heart to give; no excuse in the world will ever make her relent. She persisted with her persuasions, finally closing his fingers over it as it still lay in his palm, then once his fingers had shut it out of sight, he gave way. It is the temperament of every

artist in the world. He will take money from a woman as a child takes the milk from its mother's breast.

Once she knew there was no fear of its being returned, Anne set to work to pack up the clothes he would need.

"I don't want much," said he. "Put them in a brown paper parcel. I couldn't sweat to carry a trunk all that way into Pershore."

So the brown paper parcel was made. When all was ready, Anne put her arms round his neck. The tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"Good-bye, Dicky," she said brokenly. "Don't forget me."

He was crying, too. He knew now how much she had been to him since his mother died. They pressed their wet cheeks together and no word was said of what had happened in the sitting-room downstairs.

"God bless you, old girl," he muttered. Without turning back, she left the room.

Aimlessly he returned to the window, almost wishing now that he had never said he would go. What would the world be like without Dorothy, without Anne? In this frame of mind he might ultimately have yielded, but there was yet his pride. When the thought came definitely that he would stay after all, the remembrance of what his father had said, the thousand hopes he cherished of showing them all the things he could do, thrust the suggestion back. He must go! He would go! It was the first wrench, but once that was over

and he had begun, he knew in his heart he would be glad of it then.

Soon there came another knock upon his door. Without moving or looking round, he said, "Come in." He knew who it was.

Mr. Hollom closed the door after him.

"Aren't you going to bed at all?" he asked as he came to Dicky's side.

"No," said Dicky. "The train goes at five to six, and it'll take me a good while to walk into Pershore. I mightn't wake in time, and if I don't go to-night I'll never go."

"Beginning to regret it?"

"No, just beginning to find it's difficult, that's all—difficult to leave Anne."

"You needn't worry about Anne," said Mr. Hollom.

"Why not?"

"I'm going to look after Anne, if she'll let me."

Dicky stood up from the window-sill.

"Oh—I'm jolly glad!" he said. "I am jolly glad!" and they shook hands. "Fancy, old Anne—by Jove—I'm glad!"

"Yes—and it's not Anne you're worrying about, young man. But we'll both look after her. When you come back here next year with the money for your first little picture in your pocket, you'll find her all right. I've heard old Leggatt has got a vacancy for a second master. I'm going to apply for it. I'm afraid it won't be any more than I've been getting

up in the North, but it'll be enough. I can live cheaper here."

"That'll be ripping," said Dicky, "if you do. Has the pater gone to bed yet?"

"He was just going when I came up. I'd better not let him find me in your room. Good-night, old chap. Take that letter I gave you to Marlowe. He'll be able to help you get a start somewhere. And hoard that money as long as you can. It's all the capital you've got. I'm not going to say anything else—except work like the devil. It'll make you forget you're hungry sometimes."

Dicky took a breath and gripped his hand.

"Thanks—frightfully," he said. It was simple enough. It conveyed all he meant.

Once more, when the door closed then, he turned to the window. Leaning out again, he could hear the signs of his father's approaching departure to bed. A great while seemed to pass before he heard the key turn in the lock of the hall door, before he saw the light through the landing window as his father carried his candle up to bed.

When the light had passed, he stood up in the room and listened. To reach his bedroom, Mr. Furlong must pass his son's door. Dicky heard the soft noise of the footsteps approaching. He could see the faint glimmer of the nearing light through the space at the bottom of the door. The footsteps stopped and he held his breath.

There fell then a gentle knock on the panel. He heard his father speak his name, tentatively, as though to discover if he were asleep. He made no reply. Had he answered, what might not have altered in the life of Dicky Furlong then? For had he answered, Mr. Furlong was weighing it in his mind to say that he had not meant to be unsympathetic in his judgment of Dicky's nature.

As soon as Mr. Hollom had left him downstairs, he had laid aside his book and, dropping on his knees by the armchair, he had prayed to be given that understanding of his son which he had already gathered from the memories of his own experience. It was always the habit of his mind to pray for those things which he had already received. When he had come fully to realise that such passions, though certainly premature in Dicky, were natural and human enough, he then prayed that God would give him such realisation. So he kept burning, as many another does, the light of his faith in the efficacy of prayer.

He determined then that, if he were awake, he would speak to Dicky that very night. He could not allow in his mind that Dicky should be married in a year or two. That would make too much a man of him too soon. But he wished that his son should know how broad was his mind in impartial understanding.

Therefore he knocked; therefore he said Dicky's name. But there was no reply. Dicky stood there in the room, silent, scarcely breathing. At last Mr.

Furlong moved on down the passage. The yellow glimmer died away from the space under the door and Dicky sat down to his little table.

"DEAR FATHER," he wrote,—“I'm going away to London to work at my painting. I could never live and work in the mill. It's no good trying to find me, because I shall never come back. I want the experience you say I ought to get. Good-bye. DICKY.”

Folding it and placing it in an envelope, he addressed it to his father. Then he took up the bundle of his clothes, softly opened the door, listened, then silently crept downstairs.

As he laid his head on his pillow, Mr. Furlong thought he heard a catch snapping on a door. He sat up and listened. Everything was silent.

“If I were a nervous man,” he thought, “I shouldn't be contented until I'd found out whether there were burglars in the house.”

Then, glad that he was not a nervous man, he laid his head back on his pillow and fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIX

THE moon was riding fast in a fair heaven, as Dicky reached Eckington Bridge. She was lighting the fleet of clouds, burnishing their sails with silver as they passed her by. Up there a fresh wind must have been blowing, but closer to earth it was almost still. The young leaves of the willows were just rustling, the rustle of silk as when a woman passes through a quiet corridor. Beneath the arches the river murmured, swirling around the old stone pillars, hurrying on to sing its song amongst the reeds. Just these sounds, and but for them the night was silent and still.

Dicky laid his bundle on the ground and stood in the niche where first he had kissed Dorothy. It was not yet the hour of their meeting. Anxiety for her coming had not begun to stir in him. He felt content to lean over the well-worn parapet, to stare into the water below. Whenever the moon rode out into the full open of a cloudless space, he could see deep down below the surface where the trailing weeds swung from side to side, lashed by the passing current. He looked up into the heavens, forcing himself to believe that that same moon was riding over the countless roofs of London. To the right, above him, were the seven stars, which for

so many years he had counted from his bedroom window. He fixed these as landmarks which he would know again. The contemplation of all the work he was going to do, the fame he was going to win, were secondary matters just then. The thought that he was leaving the known for the unknown almost completely occupied his mind.

Only when Anne had been making up his parcel had he considered it of primary importance; then he had discarded garments in order to make place for his sketches and box of water-colours. With this equipment, with a few pounds in his pocket, Dicky began the great career which lay before him. Many a man has had less.

But his thoughts were little of his career in those moments as he stood alone upon the bridge at Eckington. In a short while he would be leaving Dorothy. He wondered what would happen if his father came after all to his room, found the note which he had left there and followed him to Pershore to prevent his going. Would he be so sorry if he were brought back; so sorry if, with the knowledge of how real his feelings were, his father gave him permission to marry Dorothy in a year or so?

He was in just that unbalanced state of mind as when a man has fixed his resolve and must wait with growing impatience to carry out his determination. That half hour while he waited for Dorothy upon the bridge was the severest test through which he passed. There came the most trying moment of all when, as the silence deepened for the want of those footsteps he so desired to hear, Dicky began at last to believe she was not

coming. His heart grew sick. Again the strength of the hundred men dwindled and fell away. He had then but the strength of a boy standing upon the edge of that whirling struggle for life, telling himself, feebly yet persistently against the counsel of his heart, that still he must take the plunge, must loose himself from all those things he held the dearest in order that he might be saved.

This, the first, is the greatest struggle that a man can endure. And the nearer he comes to failure, the greater the victory he wins. When he had listened and listened for the tapping of those footsteps in vain, slowly Dicky leant down and took his parcel in his hand. She was not coming, and he could not bear to go without seeing her again. However clearly he saw that what he had said to Mr. Hollom was true, however much he realised that if he did not go that night he would never go, yet he was prepared to return. Without seeing her again it was impossible to go.

He knew now that a life in the mill was his portion. His lips trembled at the thought of it. The consciousness of all he was losing in life came strongly to him then. But even at that moment there was something in him more exacting than his liberty. Nature was torturing him in her hands as God had tortured him on the hillside with the fear of death.

Slowly his feet began to move towards Eckington again. He was no good. He knew he was no good. The world was not for his conquering after all.

And then he stopped. A sound in the distance on the road had just come to his ears. Tap—tap—tap—tap it came. He swallowed the rising in his throat. Tap—tap—tap—tap—he made certain of it now. Almost with stealthiness, ashamed of those few steps he had taken, he crept back again to the bridge and laid his bundle down once more upon the ground. Another moment and the moon shot out behind a cloud. The road was light as day and far off he could see the figure of Dorothy. It was not until that instant did he realise how much they were alone.

CHAPTER XX

DICKY walked down the road to meet her. Now he left his bundle on the ground. Nervously she put out her hand to greet him. He took it, drawing her close to him and kissing her lips that were quite cold. Nature was sure of her then. She had called and Dorothy had answered. In those first few moments of their meeting, Nature was content to stand aside, to let her be shy and be timid. It was enough for the present that she had come. Dorothy herself but a few days before would never have believed that she could ever have done such a thing as this. Even having done it and escaped all chance of discovery, she still was frightened when she found the darkness all round them and they so much alone.

She may have wished to turn back. The sense of apprehension was vivid in her mind. She did not think that things would happen; but there was that nameless expectation in her thoughts that they might. She did not name those things to herself. They had no name to her. But the mysterious possibility of them was there.

So her lips were cold and her hands were trembling. She had cried that night when first she went up to her room; but no tears were near her eyes now.

"I can only stay a very little while, Dicky," she began.

"Is there any fear they'll find out?" he asked.

"Oh, no. I couldn't have come if there were. But I mustn't stay long. Besides, it's cold— isn't it?"

"Cold?" he put his arm round her shoulder. "I don't feel a bit cold, and I've been out here nearly an hour."

"Well, I'm shaking," she said; "perhaps it isn't the cold."

He drew her into the niche on the bridge and put both his arms about her.

"Do you remember that night when we stood here?" he whispered, "last autumn when the moon was rising—when I first kissed you?"

She looked up into his face and her eyes answered.

"You wanted me to kiss you, didn't you?"

The falling of her eyes answered him that.

"Do you want me to kiss you again?"

The nameless apprehension filled her mind once more. She trembled.

"Do you?"

Her lips were still cold, but warmer when his had left them. Just then her foot touched his bundle on the ground. She looked down.

"What's that on the ground?" she asked.

"My things."

"What things? Your clothes? Aren't you going back to the mill again to-night?"

He shook his head.

"I've left the mill for good now," said he; "I shan't go back there any more."

The nameless apprehension fled from her. The glaring truth of the present took its place. This was the last time she would see him. He had begun his journey already; soon he would be out of sight. The tears came back into her eyes. She wound her arm through his and held him tightly.

"Oh, Dicky," she whispered, "now I know how true it is. I've hardly really believed it till now. I don't know what I shall do."

He tried his best to comfort her.

"But are you sure you won't forget me?" she went on pitifully. "You'll find other people to care for—other people'll care for you, but never, never, never so much as I do."

Why should he not forget her? What would there be to bind him to her when once he was gone? Oh, if she could only stop him now! What had she gained by giving way that morning when they had been reconciled? How had it helped her that she had said she would let him go? In a few hours her arms could no longer hold him. She might call a thousand times his name and he would not be there to reply.

In a fit of passionate despair, she threw her arms around his neck and covered his face with kisses. He should remember her by these. The thought of them should steal across his mind whenever some other woman

sought to make him kiss her. She knew well that they would do their best. Her bitter hatred of them entered into the fierceness of her kisses. He was breathless beneath that flood of passion and thought it only was the pang of saying good-bye.

"You'll never forget me, will you?" she muttered as she ceased and looked into his eyes.

"How could I, Dorrie?" he whispered, but she felt as he said it how many a man had said that, too.

No, there was nothing with which to hold him! Even those kisses would grow cold on his lips. Her cheeks burnt hot in a bitter anger that life could be so cruel.

Then as they stood there, with her hands still bound about his neck, they became aware of the rumbling of a waggon's wheels coming out of Eckington.

"Listen!" she whispered.

Their lips were parted as they held their breath. Their eyes strained out into the semi-darkness.

"I don't think——" he began.

"Oh, listen!" she exclaimed nervously.

The sounds grew plainer, more distinct. To her intense hearing, the rumbling came through the silence like thunder drawing overhead.

"It's coming this way," she said at last. "Dicky, what shall I do? If they see me, they'll tell father! Dicky, what shall I do?"

"Why, we can hide behind those willows until it's gone. They wouldn't see us."

"They might," she objected with apprehension. "Oh, I knew somebody would come by! I knew I should be found out!"

"Well, then, come along to the old tithe barn," he suggested. "Come on—in the field over here. There's a board out on the other side—I know where we can get through. Come on—over this stile—it's only across this field. Dorrie, not a soul'll see us then."

He picked up his bundle and took her arm. In another moment they were hurrying across the damp grass of the meadow by the river's edge. The cattle stared at them as they passed, turning their heads in heavy curiosity to watch them out of sight.

The old tithe barn stood alone in the meadow. Some parts of it were crumbling in decay. At one end, where it had withstood the passing of the years, a few cows were tethered in a stall. They turned their sleepy eyes on the intruders, as Dicky and then Dorothy crept through the open space.

Her heart was beating in wildest nervousness now and when an owl with a clatter of wings left its perch on the rafters, flying through one of the crevices into the night, a cry of fear escaped from her lips. She clung fiercely to Dicky's arm.

"Only an owl," said he reassuringly, "I knew she built here. You're not afraid, are you? Dorrie, there's nothing to be afraid about."

"But it's so dark," she said.

"It is at first, but you'll get used to it. At any rate no one 'ud ever know we were here."

"Listen!" she whispered. Her fingers tightened convulsively again. They stood motionless. It was a cow in the far end of the lofty barn, grinding the cud, that dull, measured, satisfying sound which, in the daylight, is so pleasant to the ear, yet at night, in one's ignorance of its making, can chill the blood with terror in the veins.

Many a time had she passed the tithe barn when she was going through the meadows ; but never had been inside it until now. She looked fearfully above her. The old oak beams and rafters, arched and curved, were like the vaulted roof of a cathedral. The scent of hay, cooled by the night, rose almost pungently to their nostrils. It was an awesome place in the darkness, but the thought that they were out of sight of any passers-by on the road brought her a sense of security. She clung closely to Dicky still, but she was glad they were there.

He led her across the barn to where the hay was stacked loosely in one corner. Whenever a mouse scampered away before them, Dicky coughed to drown the sound of it in her ears.

"Let's sit down on this hay," said he, "and talk. I've got so many things to say." And when they had sat down, he took her hand and gazed at it in silence.

In time, the sound of that cow chewing her cud lulled the fears in her. She began once more to think of his

going, of what the world would be to her with him gone.

"Have you ever read Browning, Dicky?" she asked presently.

He shook his head.

"Mother gave me a book of his poems. She told me I ought to read them, but I can't understand them very well."

"Why did you ask me?" he inquired.

"'Cos there's one—'Night and Morning'—that reminded me of now—this old barn—your going—everything. The last two lines are wonderful, Dicky."

"What are they? Do you remember them?"

"I can't remember them properly," she replied. But this was not the truth. Word for word they were ringing in her head—

"And straight was a path of gold for him
And the need of a world of men for me."

She said them over to herself, repeating the last line, lingering over the words that brought her pain and pleasure too.

"And the need of a world of men for me."

They seemed to mean all the long nights that were to come; all the desolation and hunger in her heart. It was so cruel that he must go. For the time being this prospect monopolised her thoughts. She forgot her fear of being discovered, forgot the need of going back.

And Dicky, as he looked about him in the darkness which to their accustomed eyes was dark no longer wondered how many men could so be trusted with the woman whom they loved. He knew she was safe from him. Warm though the blood was rushing through him, the thought that she was pure laid the naked sword between them. He remembered the custom he had read of the Viking lord who, with the maid of his choice, slept with but a naked sword to part them, guarding her virtue. So they were together then, the sword protecting them.

He leant back upon the loosened hay. The scent of it was strong in his nostrils. It seemed in his mind that he wished to prove the greatness of his virtue, the strength and beauty of the love he had for her.

"Dorrie," he said gently. She bent down to his side. Slowly he drew his arm around her, slowly lest she should have forbidden him. They lay close together now. Her cheeks were touching his. The scent of her hair was like the hay. He drew in his breath as it touched his face. No man surely, had ever been so much alone with a woman before. The thought of their loneliness suddenly unnerved him. He began to tremble.

"Dicky, you're cold," she whispered.

"No, I'm not," he replied. "Only so soon and I shall be gone. If we were married, we should be like this always. Always together, every day—" his voice sank to a lower whisper—"every night."

She lay quite still. So still she lay, she seemed like

one who had been drugged, and far off in the corner of the great barn the old cow monotonously chewed her cud. Dicky felt the stillness of her body close to him and his own trembled the more. How absolutely they were alone.

"Do you feel sleepy, Dorrie?" he asked presently, when she had not moved.

"No," she replied, and in her voice he heard suffering, but dared not ask what suffering it was.

After a long silence, she asked him in a whisper when he must go.

"As soon as the sun rises," he replied. "It's up at about a quarter-past five. That'll give me just time to catch the train at Pershore."

"When the sun rises," she repeated brokenly after him and, quivering, she drew closer into his arms. There they lay then in silence on their soft bed of hay in the corner of the tithe barn. Sometimes, as the moon rode clear, a white light that was almost day flooded in through the countless chinks and spaces. At such moments, Dicky looked in Dorothy's face. Her eyes were closed, her lips parted, her breath came quick and broken on his cheeks. He tried to understand what it all meant. Was this, in his life, such a moment as he knew must come to every man? He felt that he was groping in the dark. Amazement was coming over him. Was he too horrible, too loathesome to live? Would she hate and detest him if she knew his mind?

In trembling bewilderment, he took her face in his hands.

"Dorrie," he said hoarsely, "Dorrie, say you love me, say it, say it. I feel such a brute—such an awful brute. Say you do love me."

In her breath he heard her say it. The words never reached her lips.

The church clock of Eckington then began to strike the hour. He kissed her wildly lest she should hear and choose to go. But through all his kisses she heard the chime. It came to her thoughts that she must go; but she could not move. Life might end there. It had grown so dark. She loved him so much and in a few hours he would be gone, leaving the need of a world of men to her.

"I love you, Dicky," she breathed again.

Then fell the silence once more, and in the far-off corner of the barn rose that same monotonous note, the old cow grinding the cud between her teeth.

All that night she sat beside him while he slept. Even wonder, even remorse could not keep him awake. His eyes had closed despite himself. In the struggle between his conscience and the overwhelming knowledge of his love, sleep had crept stealthily to his eyes; his

head, then resting on her shoulder, had slipped into the hollow of her arm. She knew by his breathing that he would say no more to her until the sunrise, and she smiled.

She sat there then beside him, holding him gently in her arms through all the hours of the night. It was such a moment as when a man sleeps and a woman, with wide eyes, sits thinking till the dawn. Slowly one after another the thoughts passed through Dorothy's mind.

A new courage had come to her. She felt no regret. She looked down at Dicky, and it seemed he was only a child in her arms. He could never forget her now ; not with all the countless women in the world could he ever forget her now. There was no bitterness in her heart that he was going to leave her, only the uplifting hope that he would soon return. And he would return, and he would return triumphant !

Now the sense of antagonism had vanished. The victory was to them both. He was going out into the world, and she had won such hold upon his life as he could never put aside. And all these things she vaguely knew ; for all these things there was a dim rejoicing in her heart. It rose sufficiently to her consciousness as to drive away all fear of the present, to obscure all fear of what the future might bring to pass.

As the time went by, she thought, too, of her mother, knowing and understanding now all that had seemed inexplicable before. Even she realised the likeness be

tween them, and in a prayer, half spoken aloud, thanked God she was to wed a man she loved. And because they loved, who could say a word against them now? She realised no possibility of suffering or sorrow for herself then. However many the miles which might divide them, inevitably and eternally they belonged. Nothing could separate them now.

So in the darkness, now in the unbroken silence too, Dorothy sat thinking of their lives until, through the open space through which they had come, she saw the first grey light of dawn. Only then did her lips begin to tremble.

With tears gathering in her eyes she sat motionless, watching the kindling of that mighty furnace of the dawn. Slowly the dark grey smoke of it rose out of the east. It rent the darkness of the night and in broad bands crept slowly up the heavens. At the first sign of the gathering fire below the horizon, when the deep grey turned to purple and a strip of palest yellow lay across the line of the hills, she knew that it was nearing the end. Swiftly from that moment then it changed before her eyes.

It was a furnace no tears of hers could quench. Steadily it kindled below that line of hills, as though a city were bursting into flames the other side. Steadily the grey smoke drifted to the west turning to rosy purple as it caught the reflection of the fire. Steadily the east lit up with the rising flames, burning with red and then with orange, then with gold. And so at last,

with leaping tongues of light, it burst above the hills. The furnace of the day was lit, the flames were curling into heaven. The sun was up.

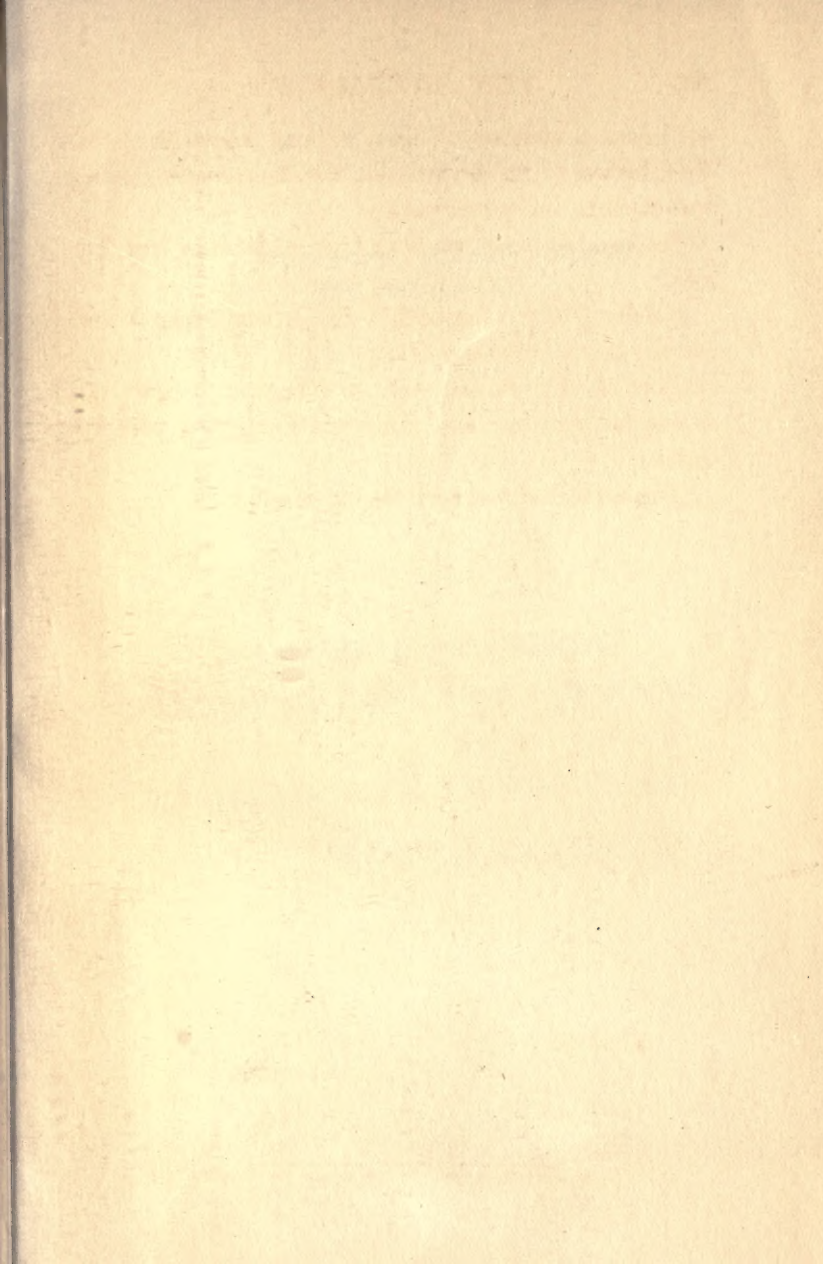
She brushed away the tears that were falling from her eyes.

"Dicky," she whispered, "the sun has risen," and leaning down she kissed his lips.

Then Dicky awoke, and in the hedge that ran beside the barn he heard a blackbird juggling with its notes.

The world had wakened for his conquering.

THE END





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